

# Ha Ruy



STORY BY YUTO YOTSUBA  
ART BY RYO OGAWA



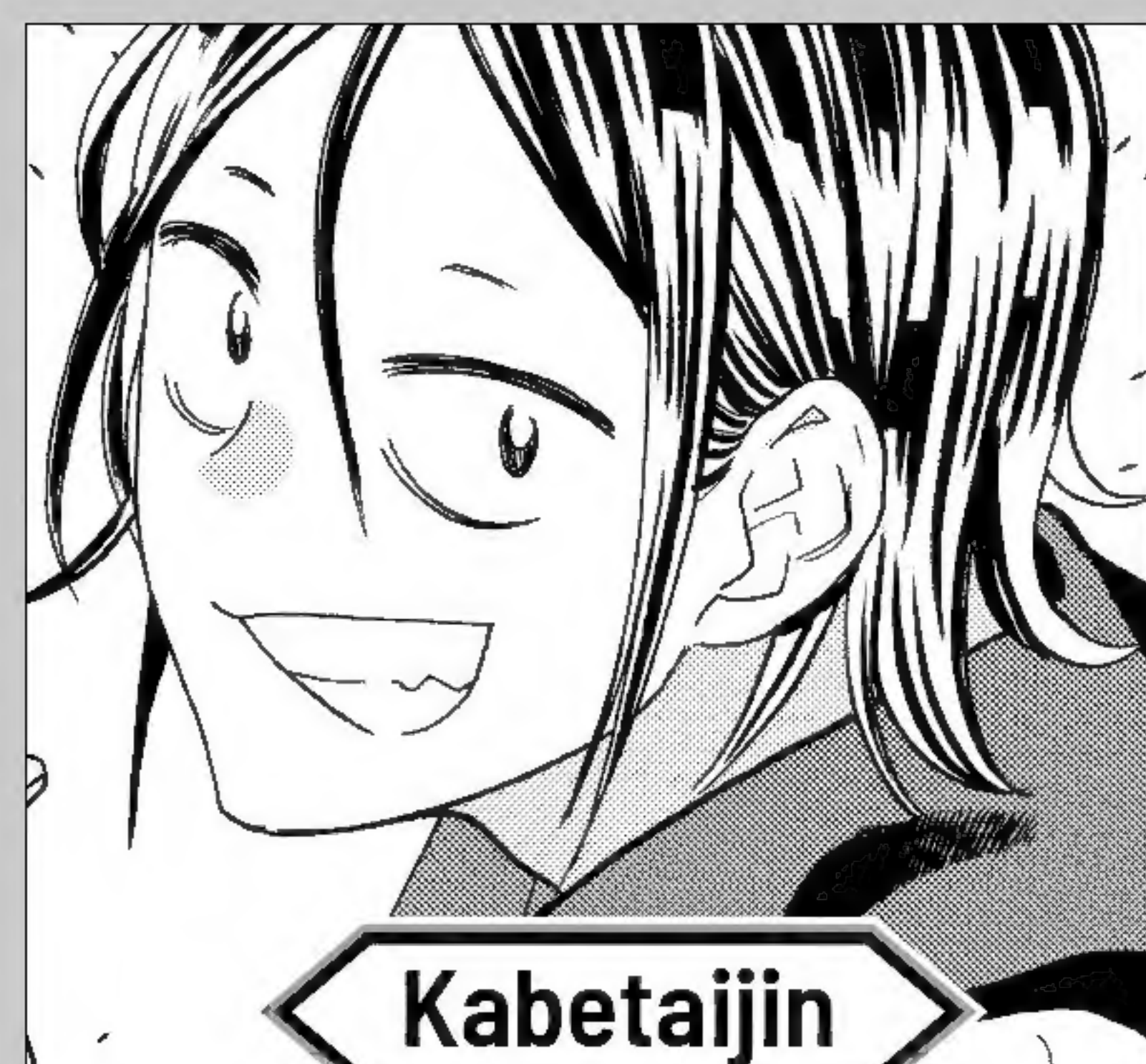
# ya Boy Kong! ming!

10

STORY BY **YUTO YOTSUBA**

ART BY **RYO OGAWA**





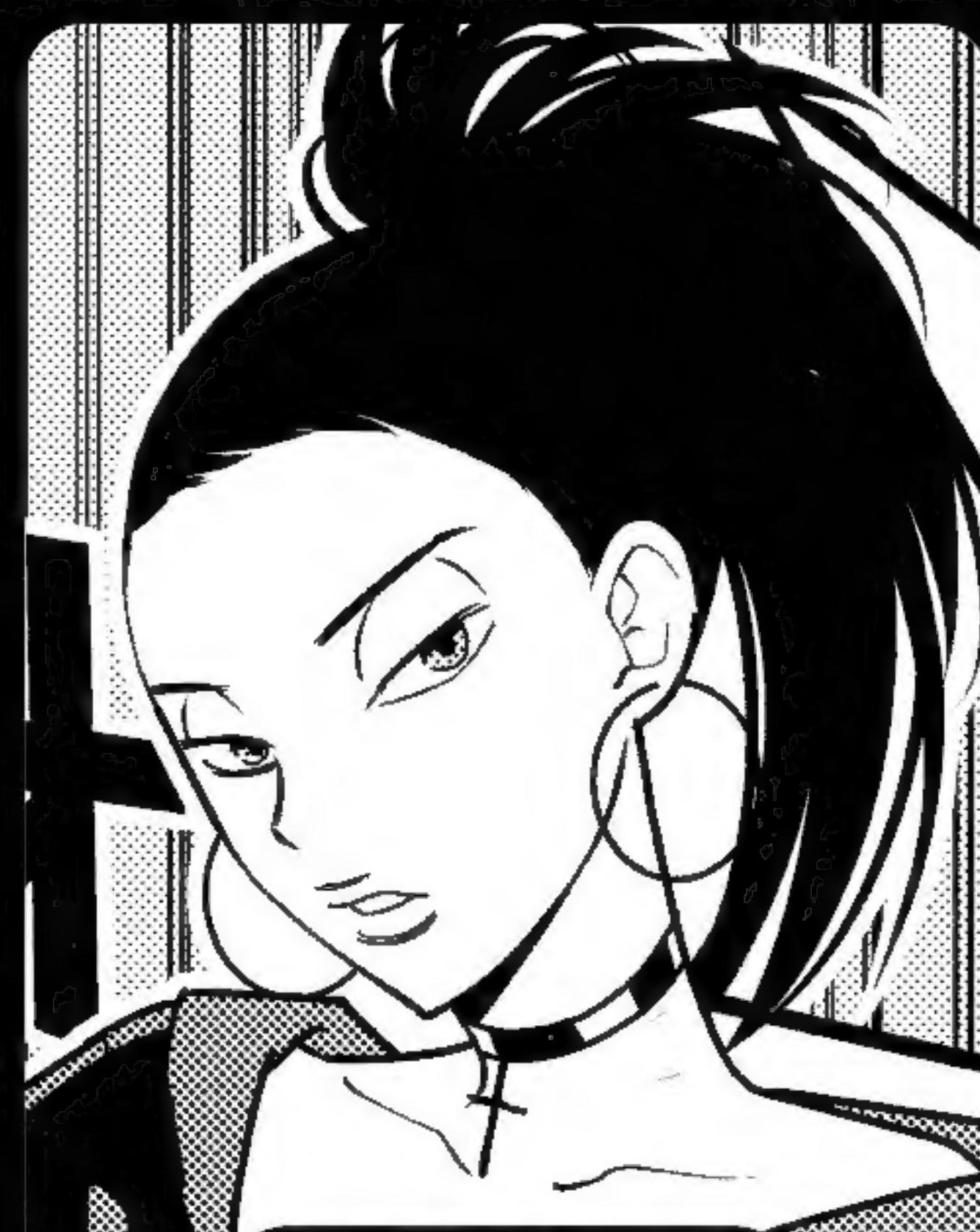
Kabetaijin

A rapper and three-time victor of the MC battle DRB with overflowing potential. But due to a past trauma, he swore to never step foot on stage again.



Hajime Shoji

Wagamono Gaori's producer from the major label, SSS Music. His goal is to create a borderless music industry that has a heavy focus on the artists themselves, which led him to joining Kongming's Fourth Kingdom.



Mia Iriomote

A singer who is often seen in the club scene. She asked Eiko to sing in an event she's attending so she could use her, but Eiko ended up stealing her audience instead.



Kisuku Jonouchi

A producer from SSS Music. He is trying to scout EIKO from Kongming and have her debut with SSS Music instead.



Avil Suzuki

The department director of KEY TIME, another major label that's as influential as SSS Music. She has full authority over KEY TIME's music and production departments.

## THE STORY SO FAR

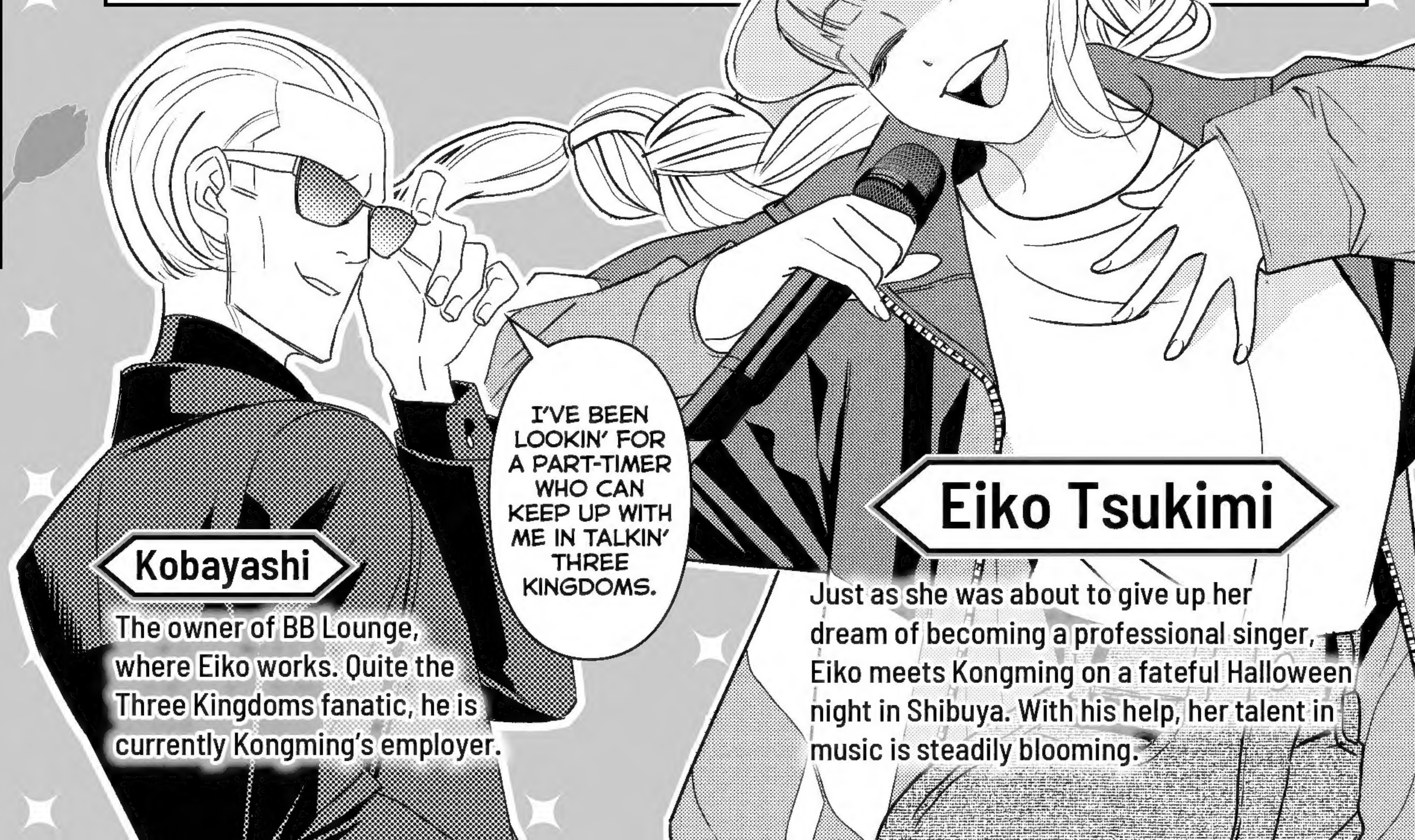
With the newly created label, **Fourth Kingdom**, Kongming takes a stand against the other mighty labels! The major forces of their army—Key Time's **Oshikaru**, V-EX's **Satsuki Oka**, and SSS Music's **Prominence**—are gathered, resulting in a heart-racing **three-team collaboration** under the Fourth Kingdom! Kongming's newest strategy is revealed, creating a **big business opportunity** in the music world. His confidence and courage renewed, **Hajime Shoji** then proceeds to suggest their next plan...and the **collaboration of friendship** between Wagamono Gaori and Oshikaru is set in motion! Meanwhile, the savior of their company, the incredibly talented part-timer, is being tricked out of all of her money by a **nasty host**. In order to save her from the host's grasp, Kongming takes on the challenges at the **Kabukicho entertainment district!!**



Zhuge Liang (Courtesy name Kongming)

The tactician of Shu. In 234 CE, Kongming passed away during the Battle of Wuzhang Plains, after which he was transported to Shibuya, 1800 years in the future. There, he meets the aspiring singer, Eiko Tsukimi, and appoints himself as her personal tactician.

CHARACTERS



Kobayashi

The owner of BB Lounge, where Eiko works. Quite the Three Kingdoms fanatic, he is currently Kongming's employer.

I'VE BEEN LOOKIN' FOR A PART-TIMER WHO CAN KEEP UP WITH ME IN TALKIN' THREE KINGDOMS.

Eiko Tsukimi

Just as she was about to give up her dream of becoming a professional singer, Eiko meets Kongming on a fateful Halloween night in Shibuya. With his help, her talent in music is steadily blooming.



CHAPTER 73

**The Legend of Kabukicho**

CHAPTER 74

**Health First**

CHAPTER 75

**The Face of a Professional**

CHAPTER 76

**1st Album**

CHAPTER 77

**The Stage**

CHAPTER 78

**Friendship and *Daiginjo* Sake**

CHAPTER 79

**Oncoming Sparks**

CHAPTER 80

**The Start of Summer Sonia**

CHAPTER 81

**Writhing Festival**

EXTRA

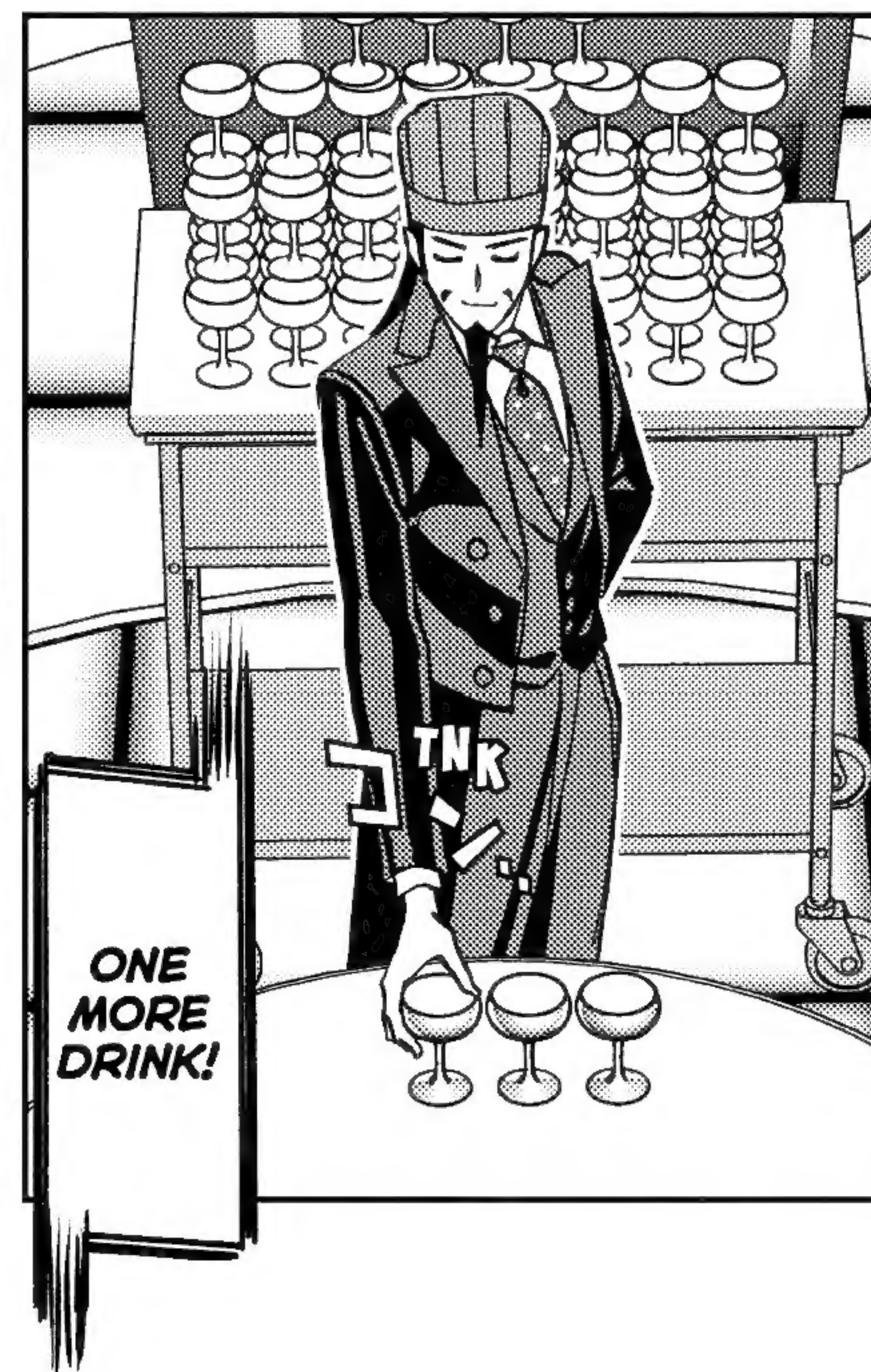
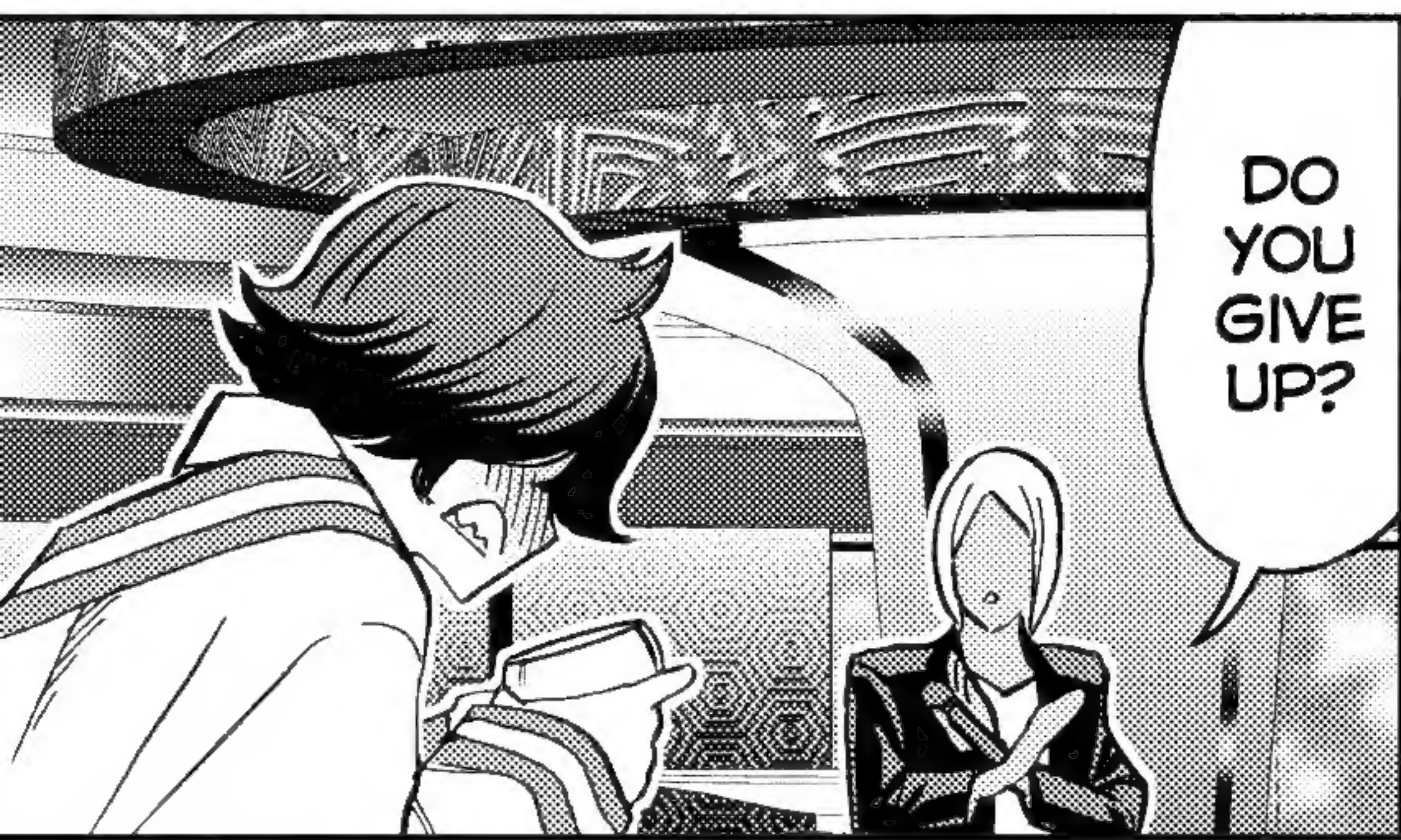
**Special Short Story "*Kongming, the Pinch-Hitter*"**

C O N T E N T S

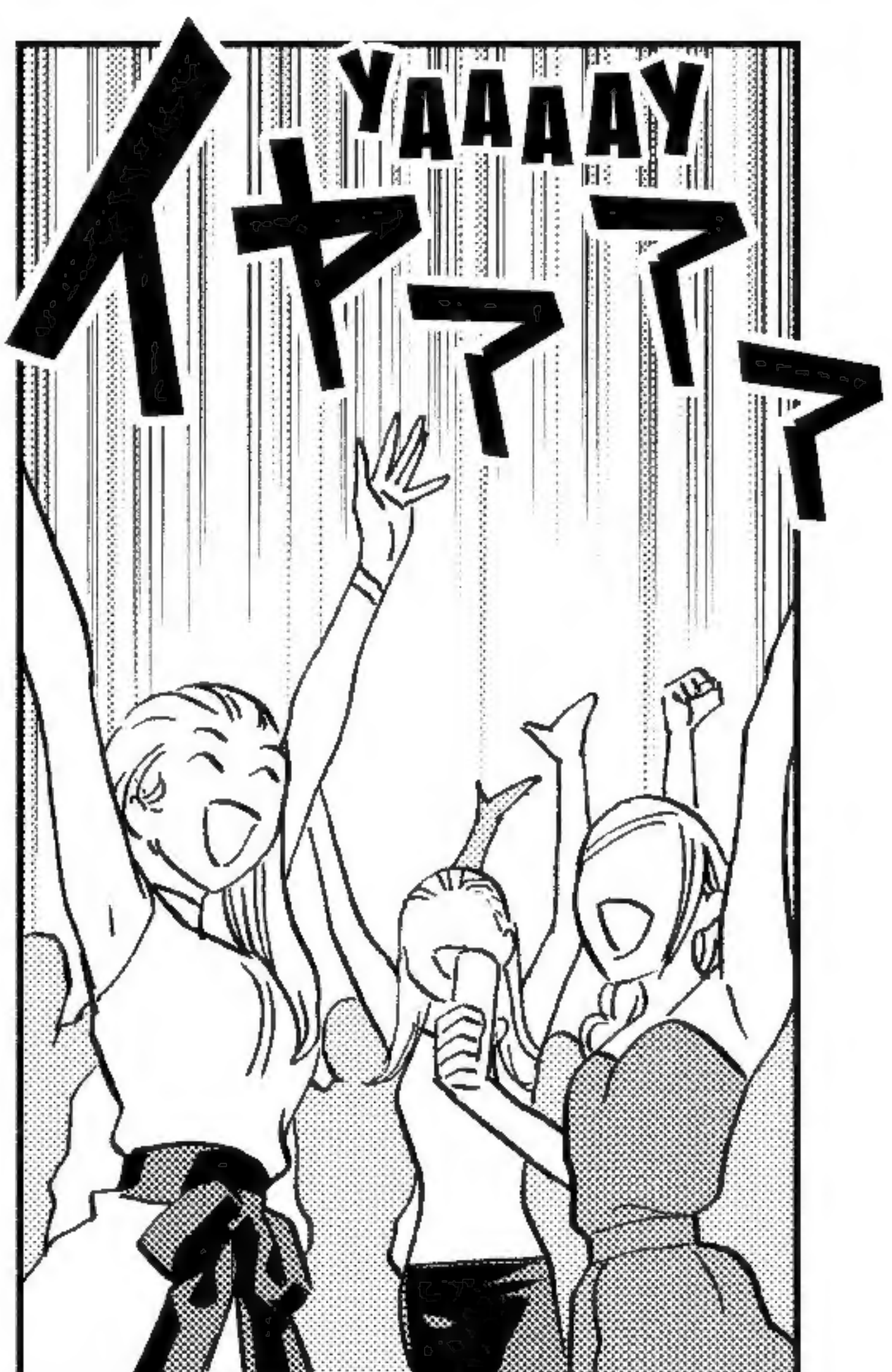
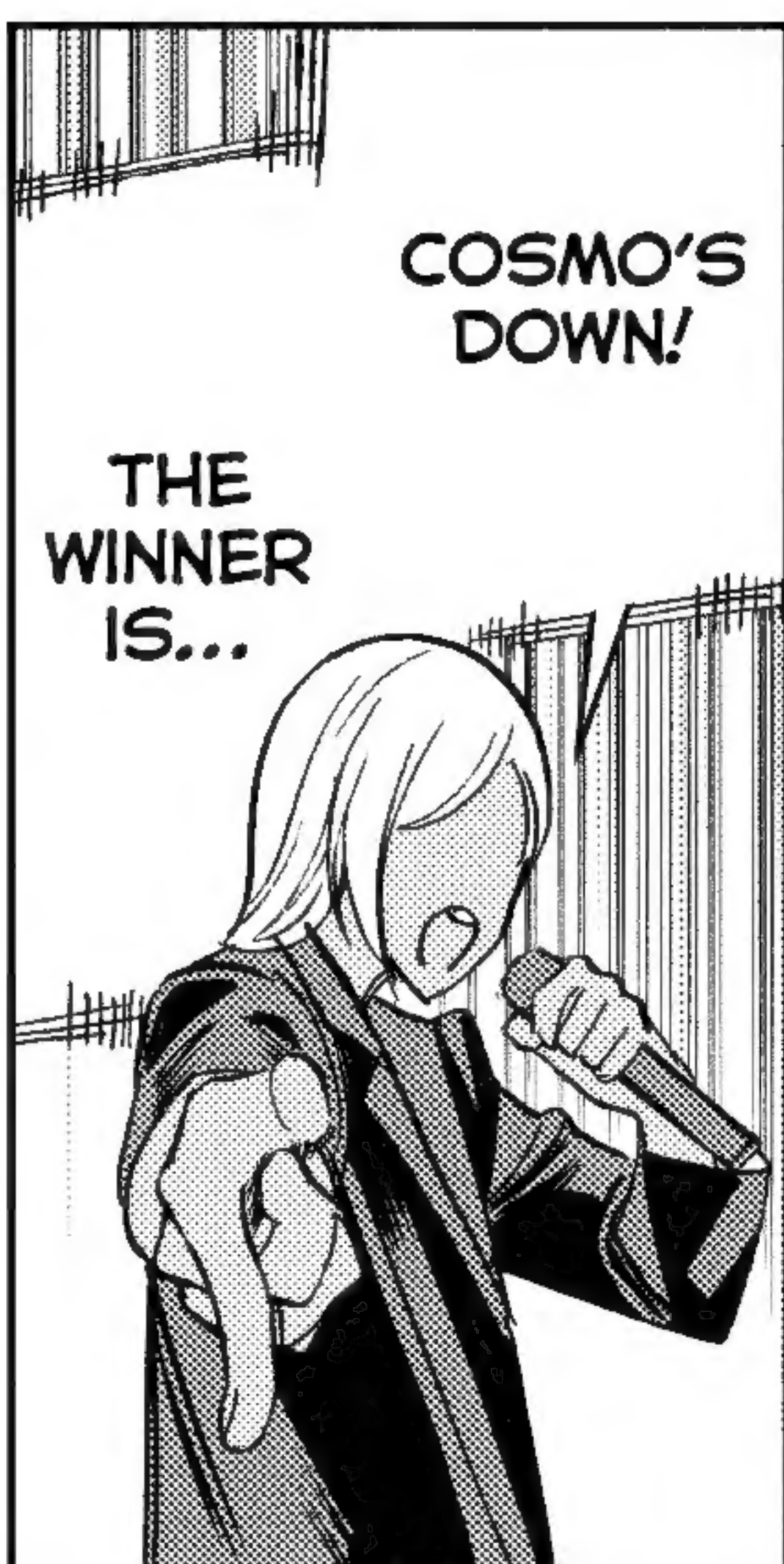














...HOWEVER,  
I DID RECEIVE  
QUITE THE  
OPPORTUNITY  
TO ENJOY SOME  
DELICIOUS  
ALCOHOL THIS  
EVENING.

AN  
ALCOHOL  
DRINKER'S  
INTEREST IS  
NOT IN THE  
ALCOHOL  
ITSELF...\*

• 醉翁之意不在酒 IN OTHER WORDS, SOMEONE MIGHT  
BE MOTIVATED BY SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT  
THEY'RE DOING ON THE SURFACE.

THIS IS  
WHAT YOU  
GET FOR  
TRICKING  
YOUR  
CLIENTS!!

SERVES  
YOU  
RIGHT,  
COSMO!

SHUT  
UUUP...

...KONG-  
MIIING!





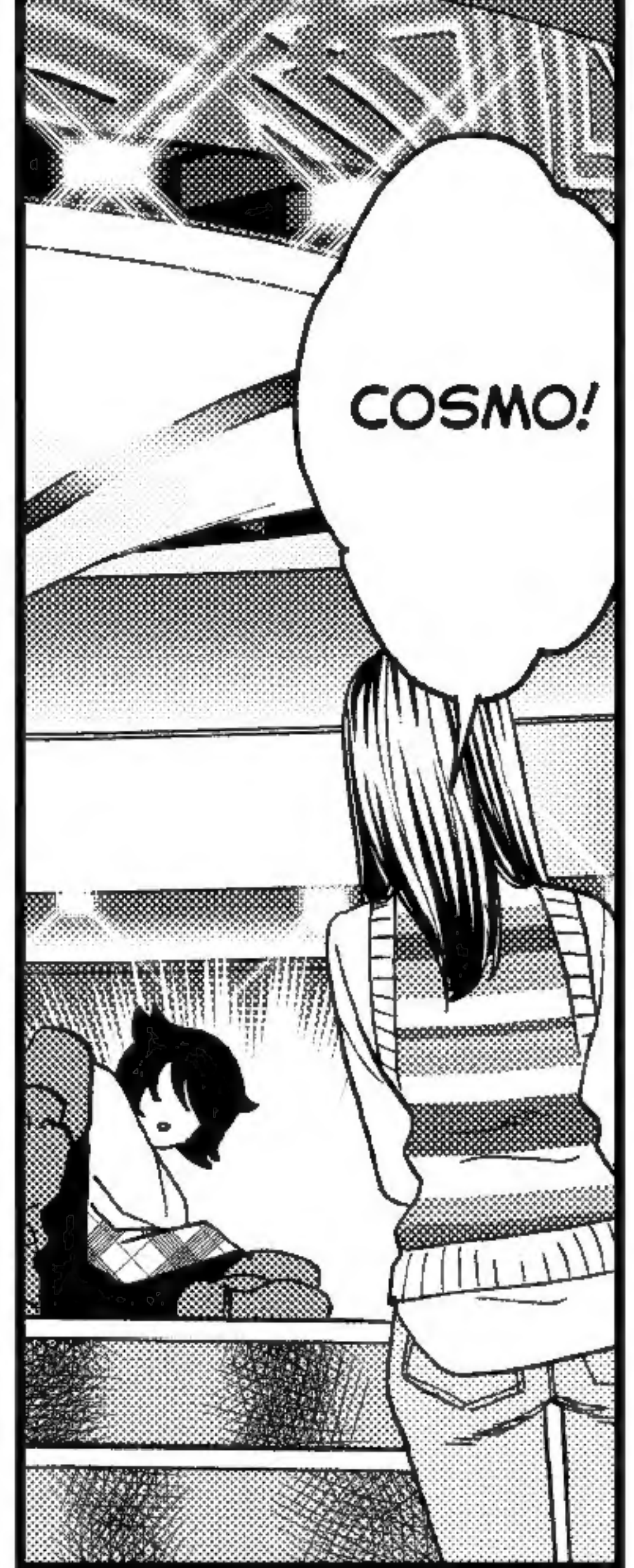




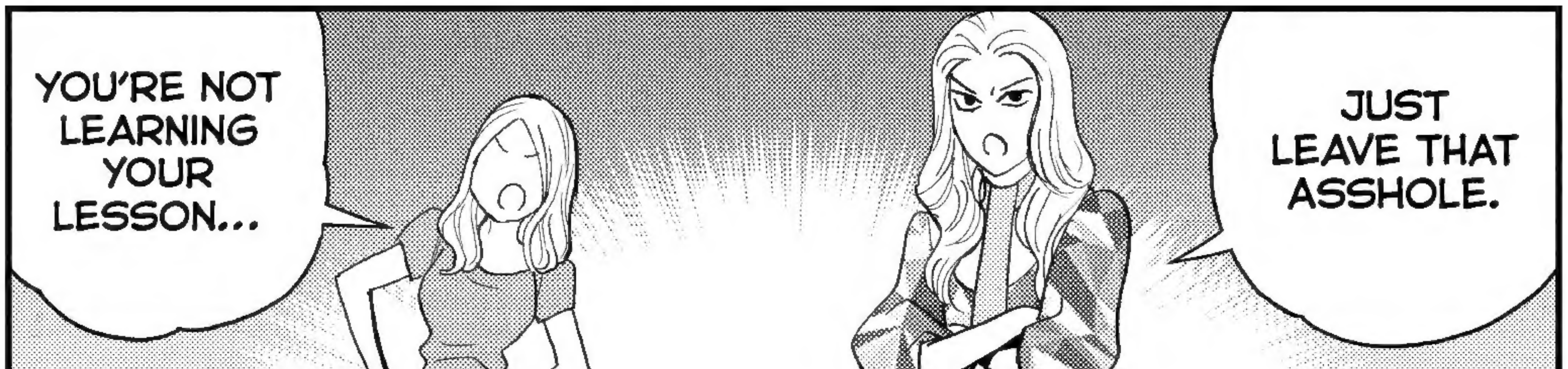


ARE YOU  
OKAY? DO  
YOU STILL  
FEEL SICK?

HERE,  
YOU NEED  
TO DRINK  
WATER!

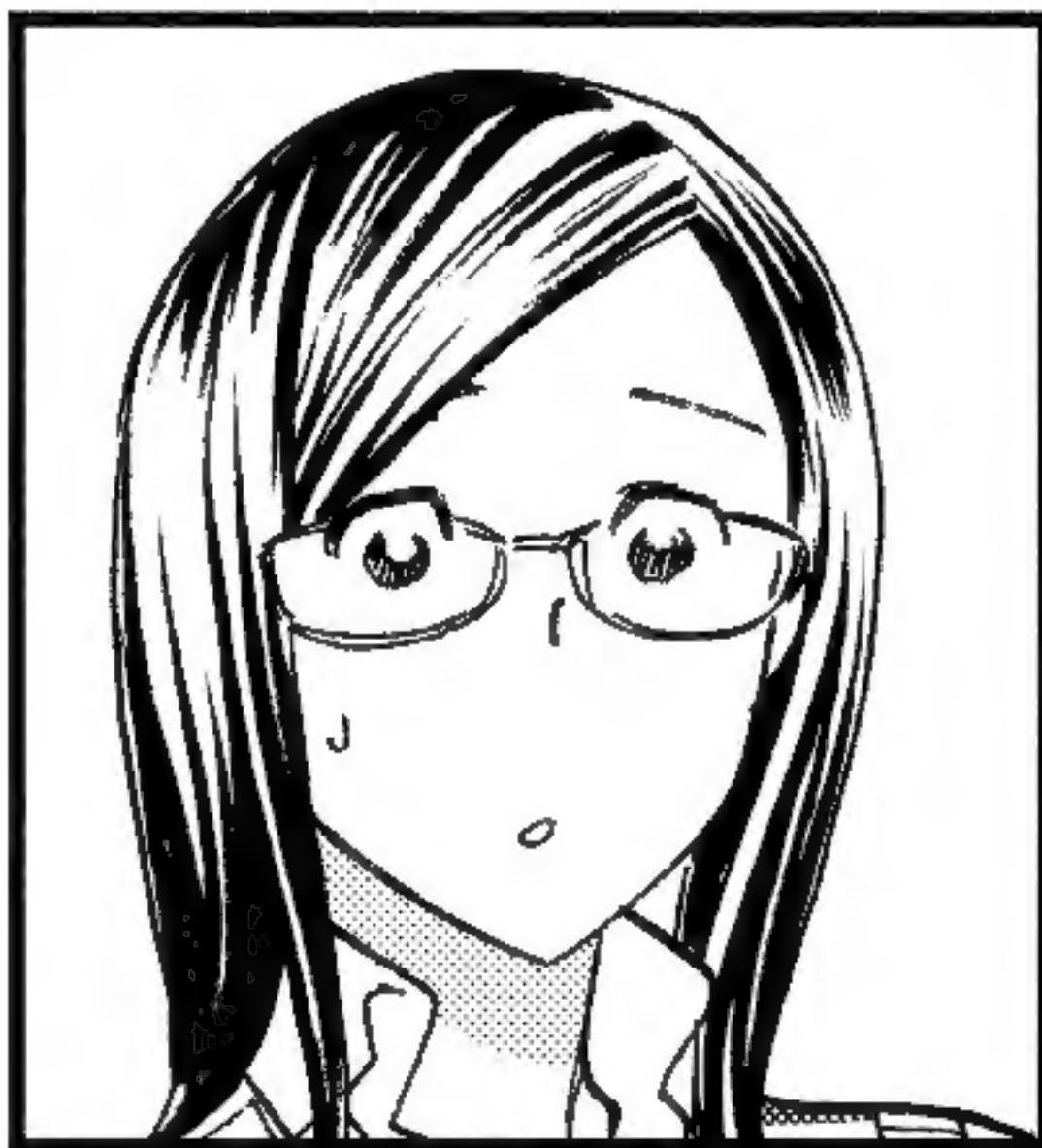


COSMO!



YOU'RE NOT  
LEARNING  
YOUR  
LESSON...

JUST  
LEAVE THAT  
ASSHOLE.



STARE



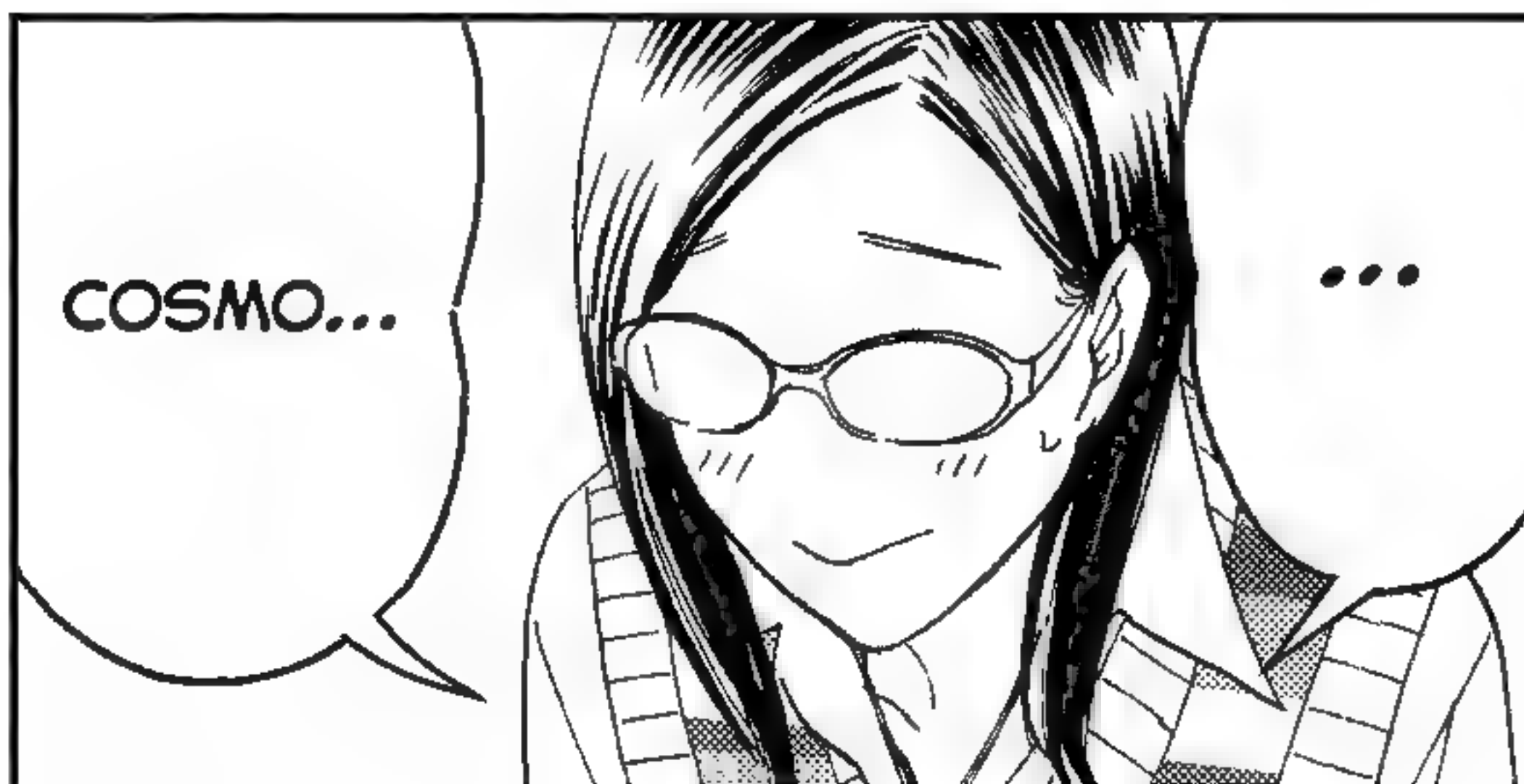
7° BWAH

IT'S  
GOOD  
...

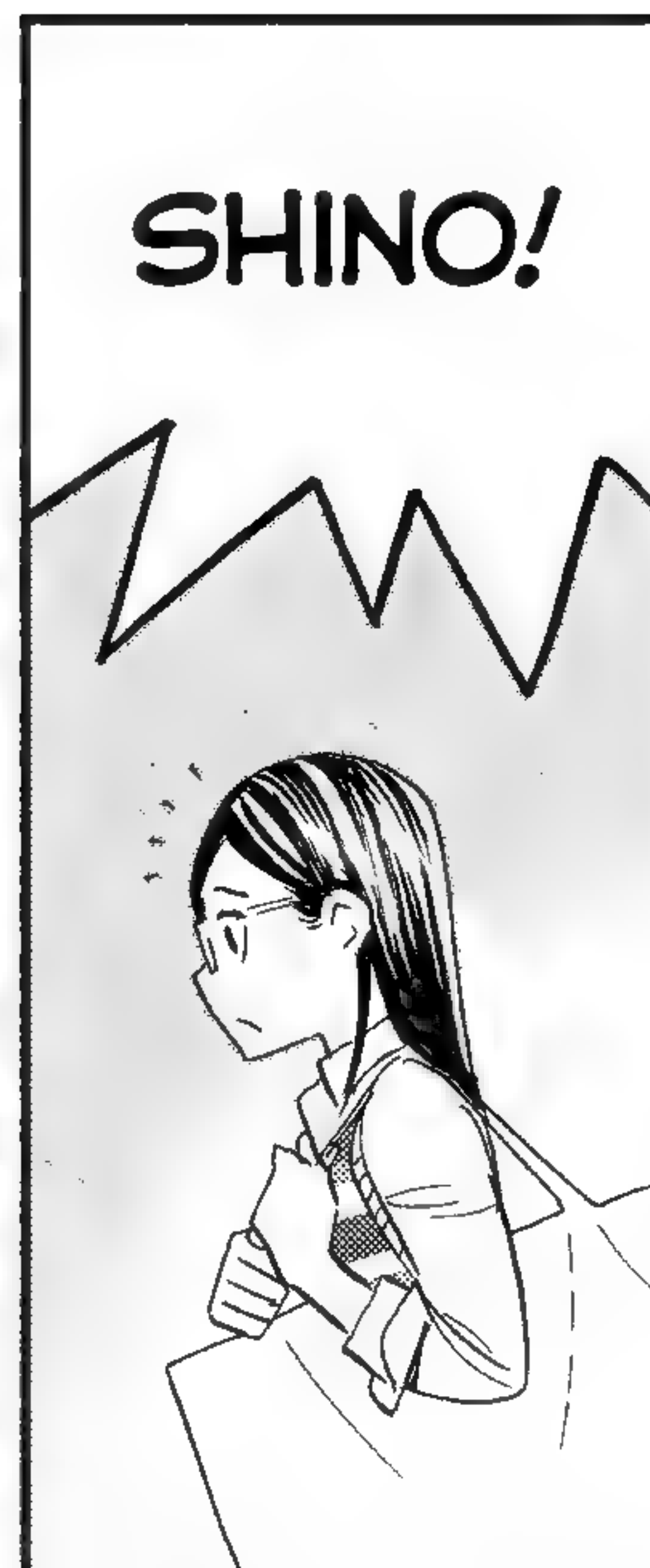
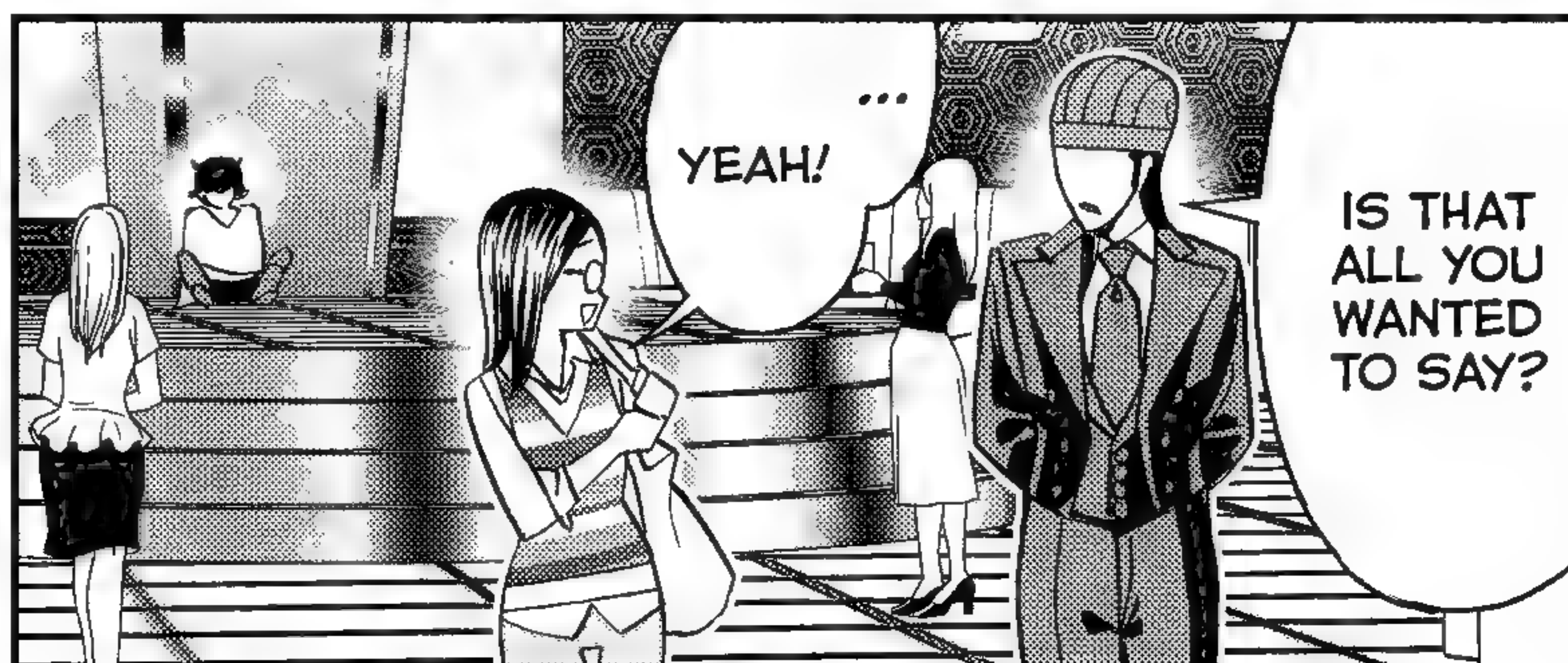
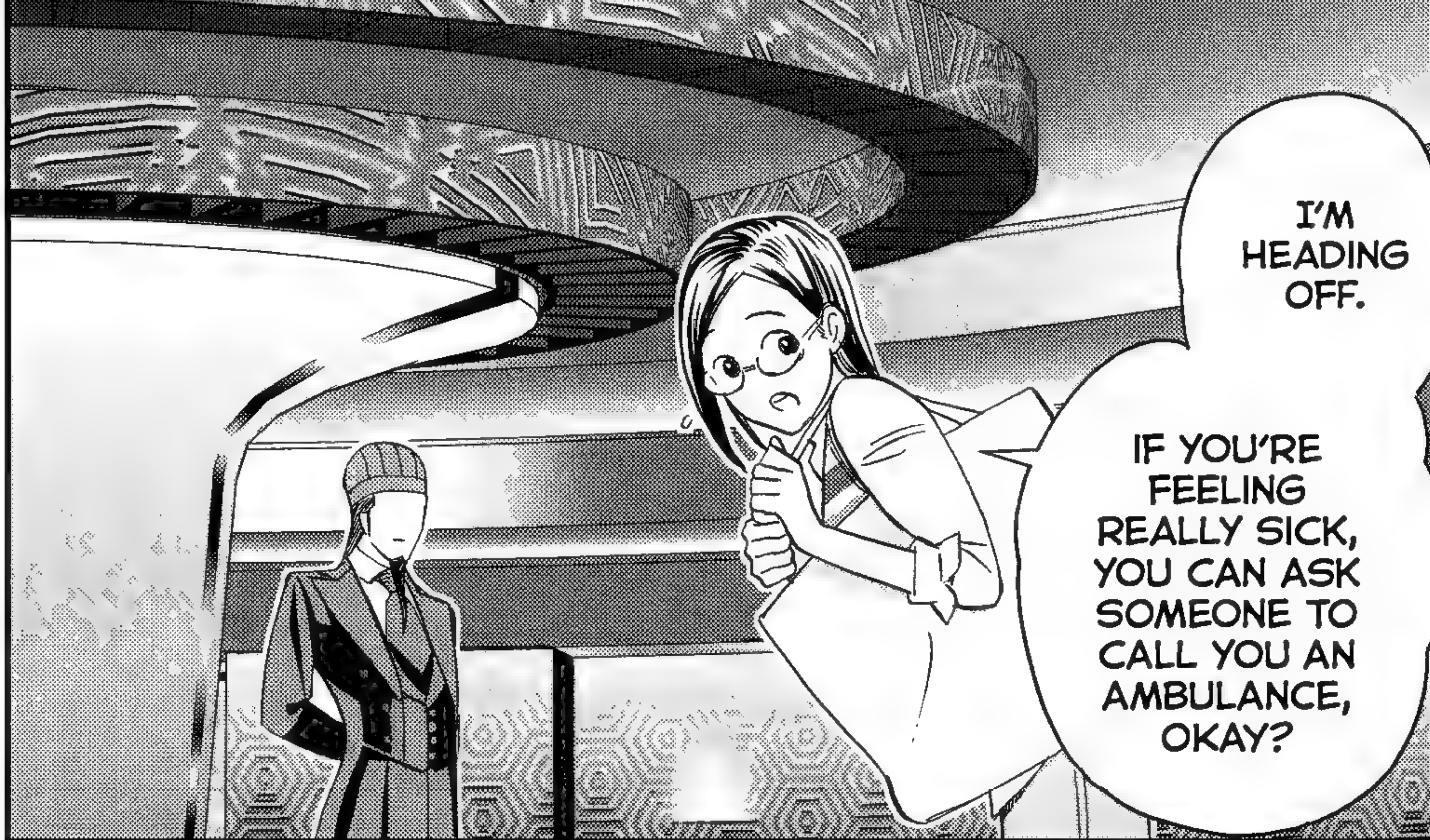


SHINO...











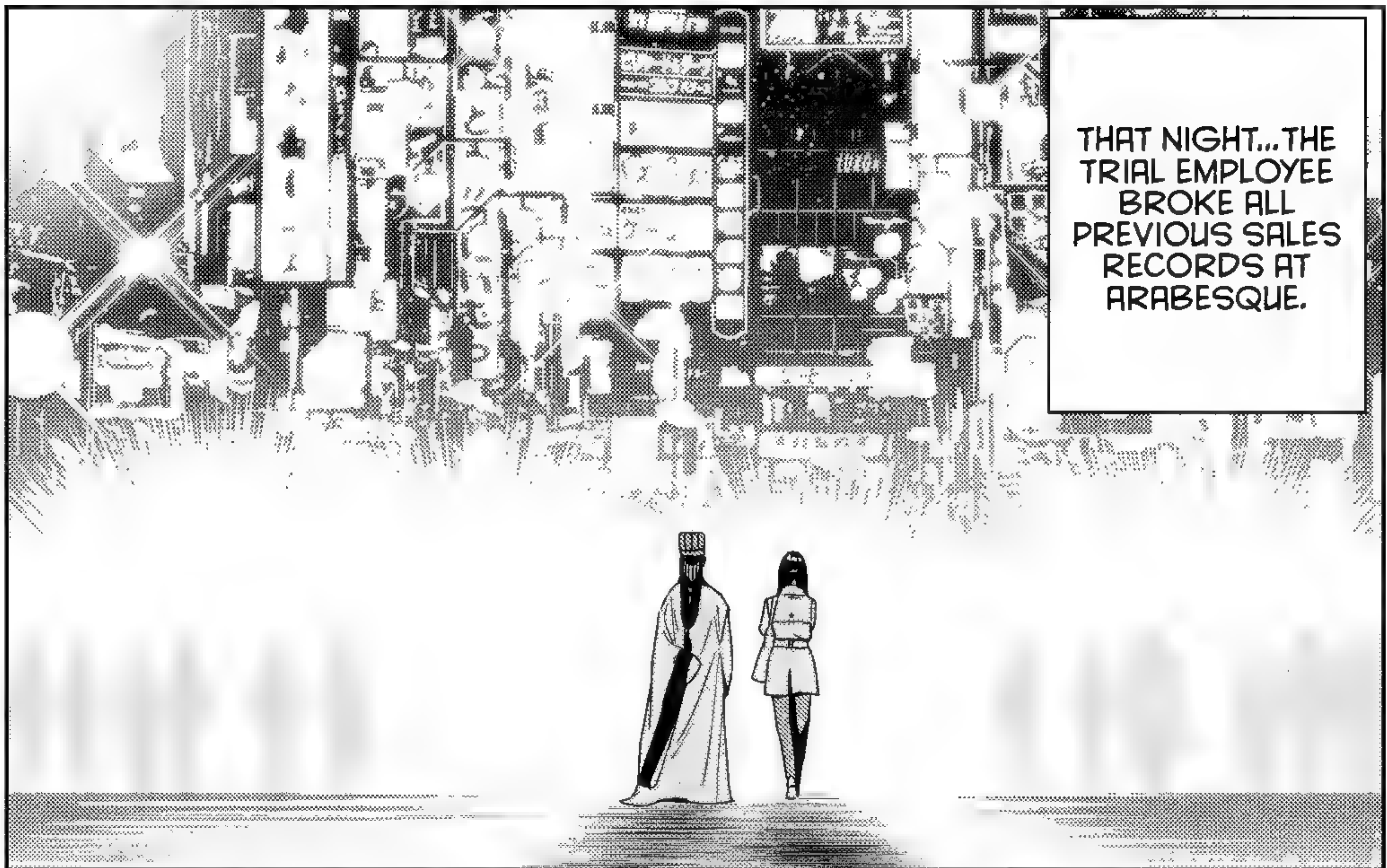


I HAD A  
WONDERFUL  
DREAM WITH  
YOU.



GOOD-  
BYE,  
COSMO.

...



THAT NIGHT...THE  
TRIAL EMPLOYEE  
BROKE ALL  
PREVIOUS SALES  
RECORDS AT  
ARABESQUE.



...AND COSMO  
WOULD EVENTUALLY  
REWRITE THAT  
LEGEND IN HIS  
OWN RIGHT...BUT  
THAT STORY WILL  
BE LEFT FOR  
ANOTHER DAY.

HE BECAME  
A LIVING  
LEGEND AT  
KABUKICHO...

ARABESQUE  
KONGMING





NOT AT ALL.  
"OUTSIDERS  
SHAN'T SPEAK  
OUT OF ONE'S  
OWN CLOSE  
RELATION-  
SHIPS."\*

I SHOULD  
BE THE ONE  
TO APOLOGIZE.  
I HOPE I HAVE  
NOT OVER-  
STEPPED YOUR  
BOUNDARIES.

I'M SO  
SORRY,  
KONG-  
MING-  
SAN.

YOU DIDN'T  
HAVE TO DO  
SO MUCH  
FOR ME...

\*A QUOTE FROM KONGMING IN THE ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS.



IS THAT SO?  
BUT YOU  
STILL LOOK  
QUITE GRIM,  
MY LADY.

I THINK  
WHAT YOU  
DID WAS  
FOR THE  
BEST.

NO...



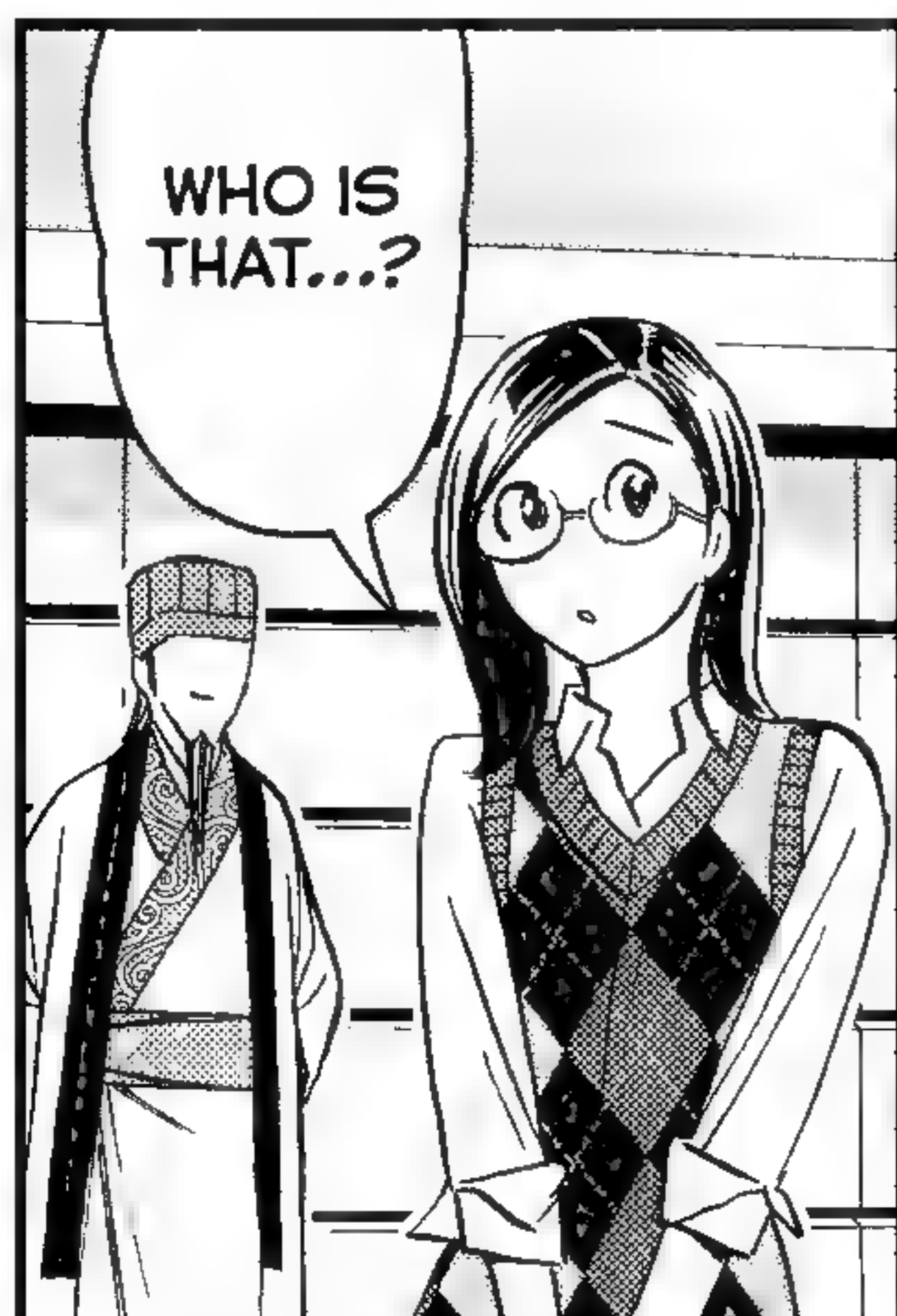
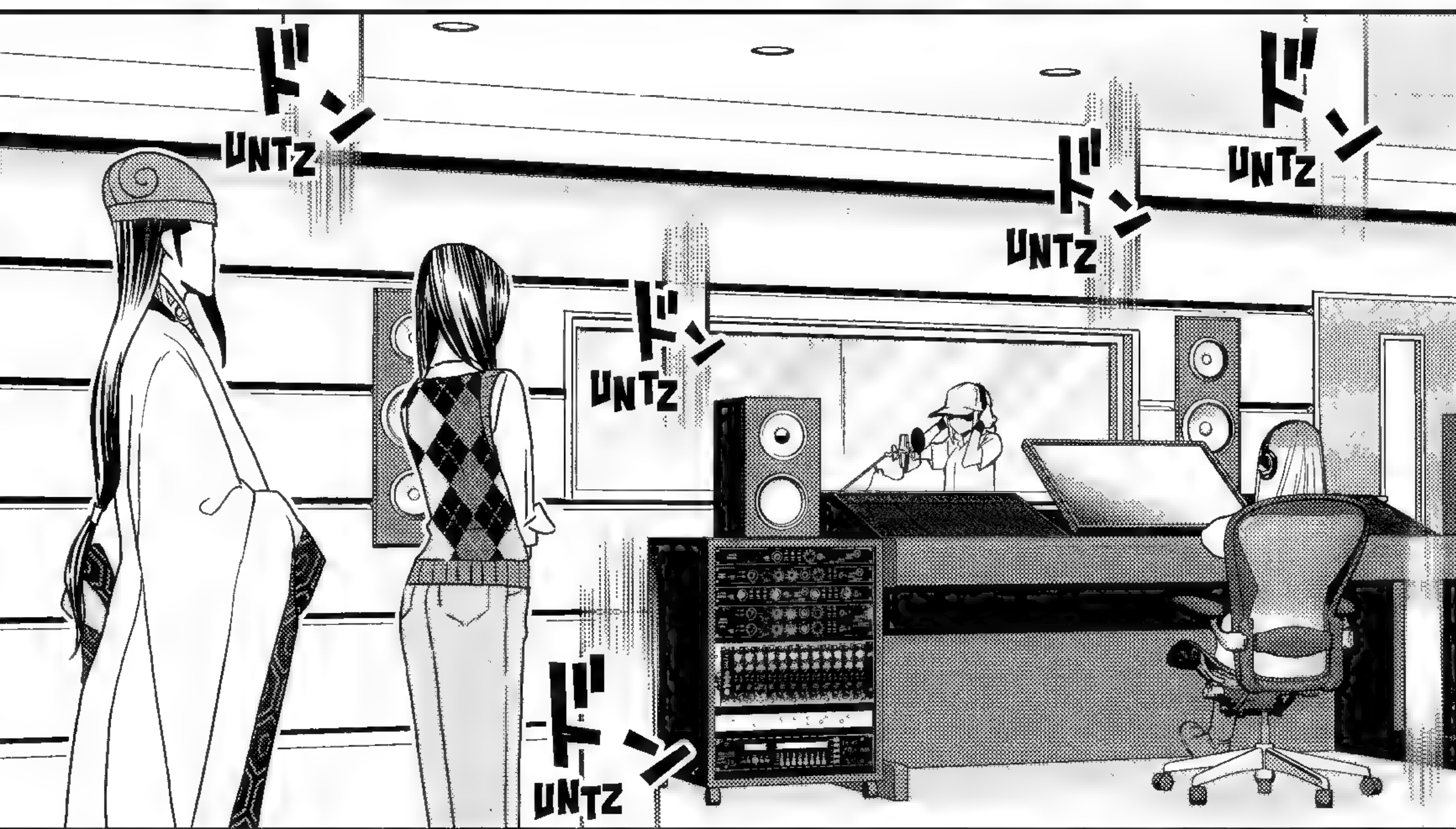
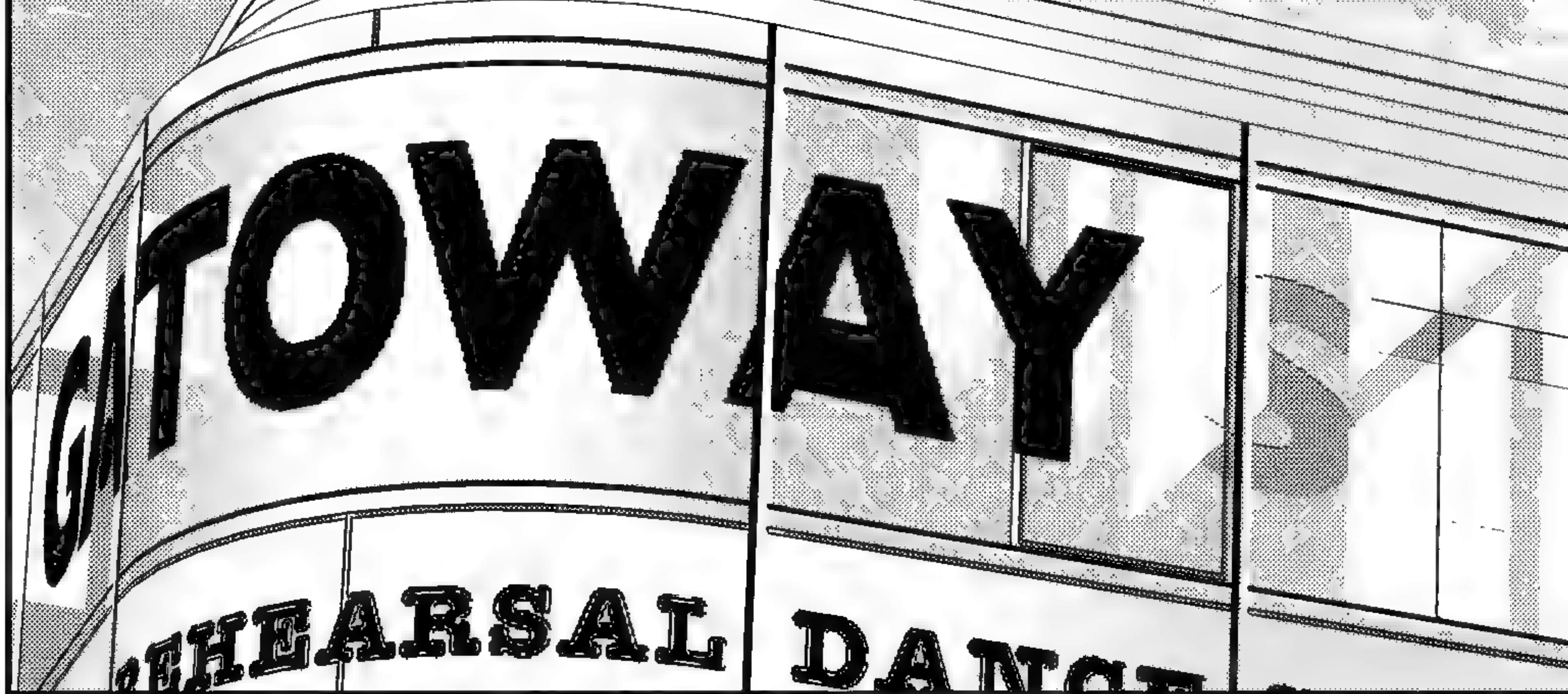
SUPPORTING  
COSMO WAS  
MY ONLY  
PURPOSE IN  
LIFE, REALLY...

YEAH...  
WELL, I'VE  
NEVER REALLY  
HAD A DREAM  
BEFORE...OR  
ANYTHING THAT I  
WAS PASSIONATE  
ABOUT...











IT'S LIKE I'M  
FLYING IN THE  
SKY...I FEEL LIKE  
HER VOICE CAN  
CARRY ME TO THE  
ENDS OF EARTH...

...HER  
NAME IS  
LADY EIKO.

WHAT IS  
THIS...?



SHE IS  
FOURTH  
KINGDOM'S  
ORIGINAL  
SINGER...

WOW...



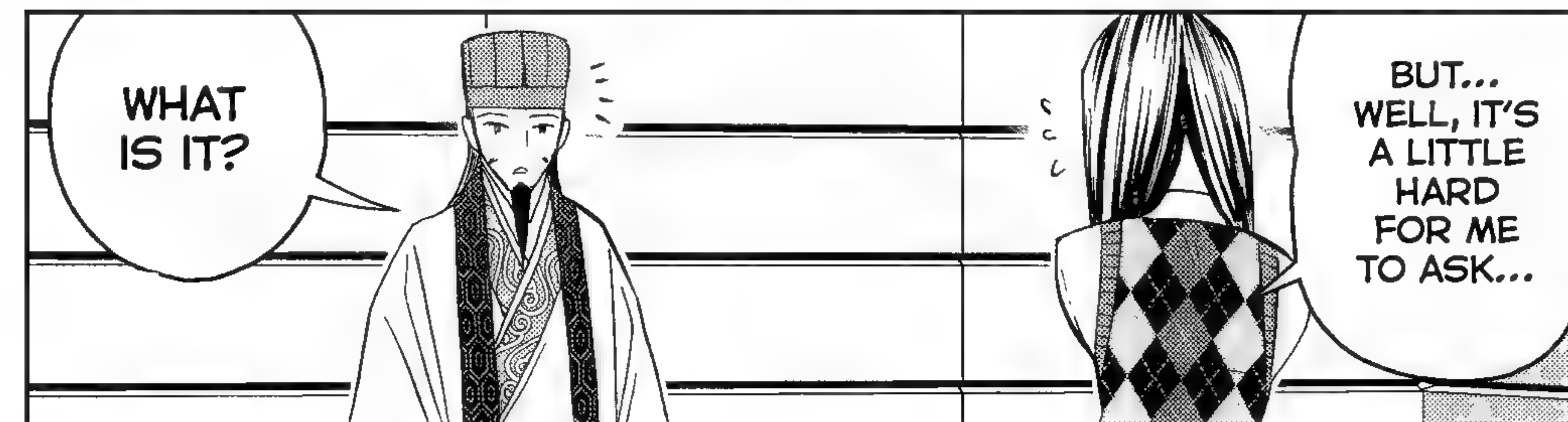
KONG-  
MING-  
SAN...

THANK  
YOU!

MAY I ASK  
YOU TO BECOME  
AN OFFICIAL  
EMPLOYEE OF  
OUR COMPANY  
AND AID US IN  
OUR MISSION?

IN ORDER TO  
BRING LADY  
EIKO'S VOICE  
TO THE WHOLE  
WORLD...







...IS  
THAT OKAY  
WITH YOU,  
THOUGH?

...IF I'M TO  
BE EMPLOYED  
FORMALLY,  
I'D LIKE TO  
NEGOTIATE  
THE TERMS...

AND CREATE  
A NEW CONTRACT  
WITH THE PROPER  
CONDITIONS...

WE WILL PREPARE  
THE NECESSARY  
OFFER AND DRAFT  
A NEW CONTRACT  
FOR YOU.

HEH HEH  
HEH...  
WHY, OF  
COURSE.

DON'T  
INDULGE  
YOUR  
PERSONAL  
HOBBIES  
AT WORK,  
PLEASE!

I'LL ALSO  
HAVE THE  
ESTIMATES FOR  
THE SPECIALLY-  
MADE BADGES  
AND WRIST-  
BANDS DONE  
SOON!

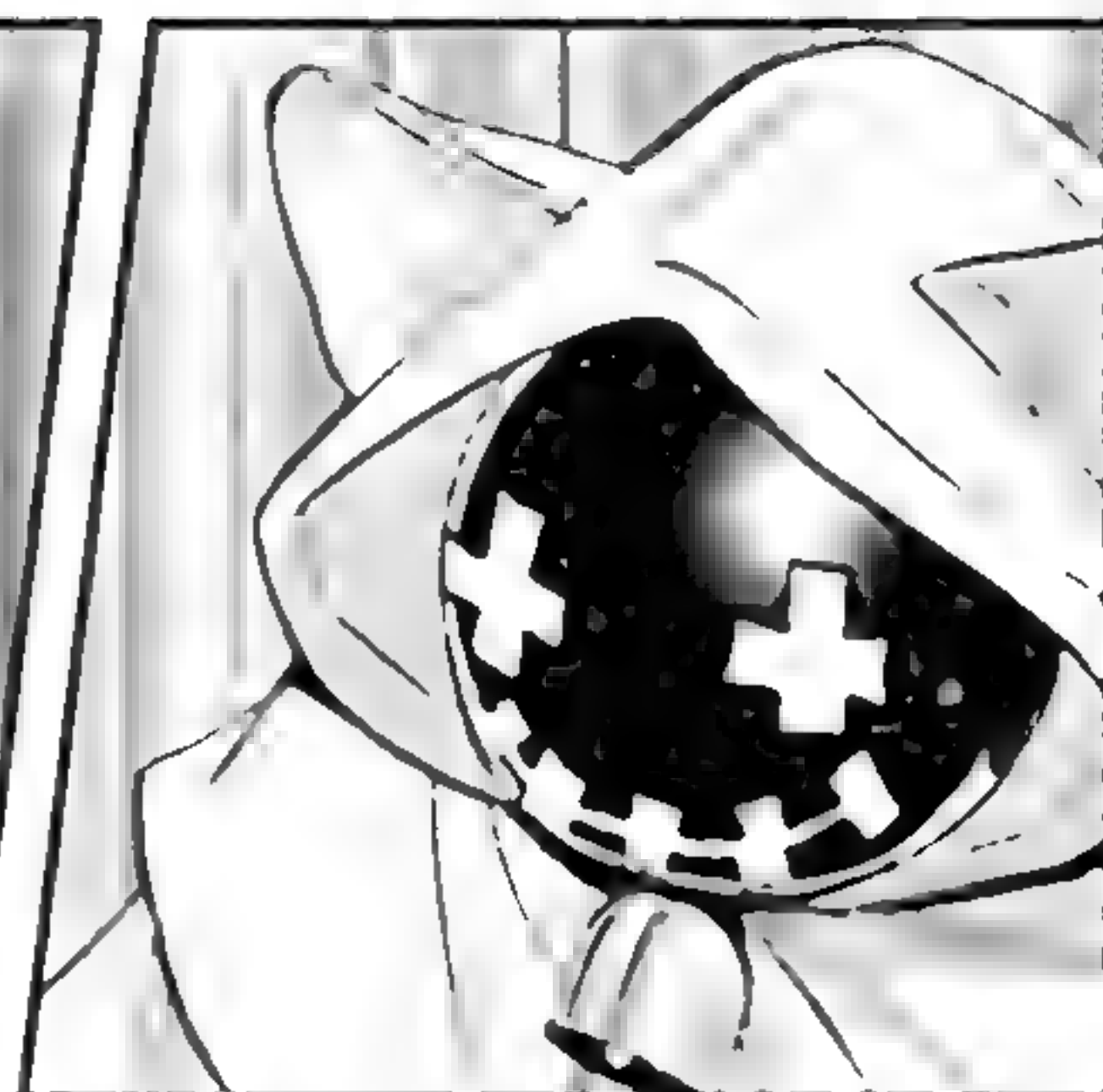
SHOJI-SAN!  
THE SPECIAL  
EIKO ACRYLIC  
STANDS AND  
EIKO MASKING  
TAPE SAMPLES  
ARE ALL HERE!

**BB**  
Lounge

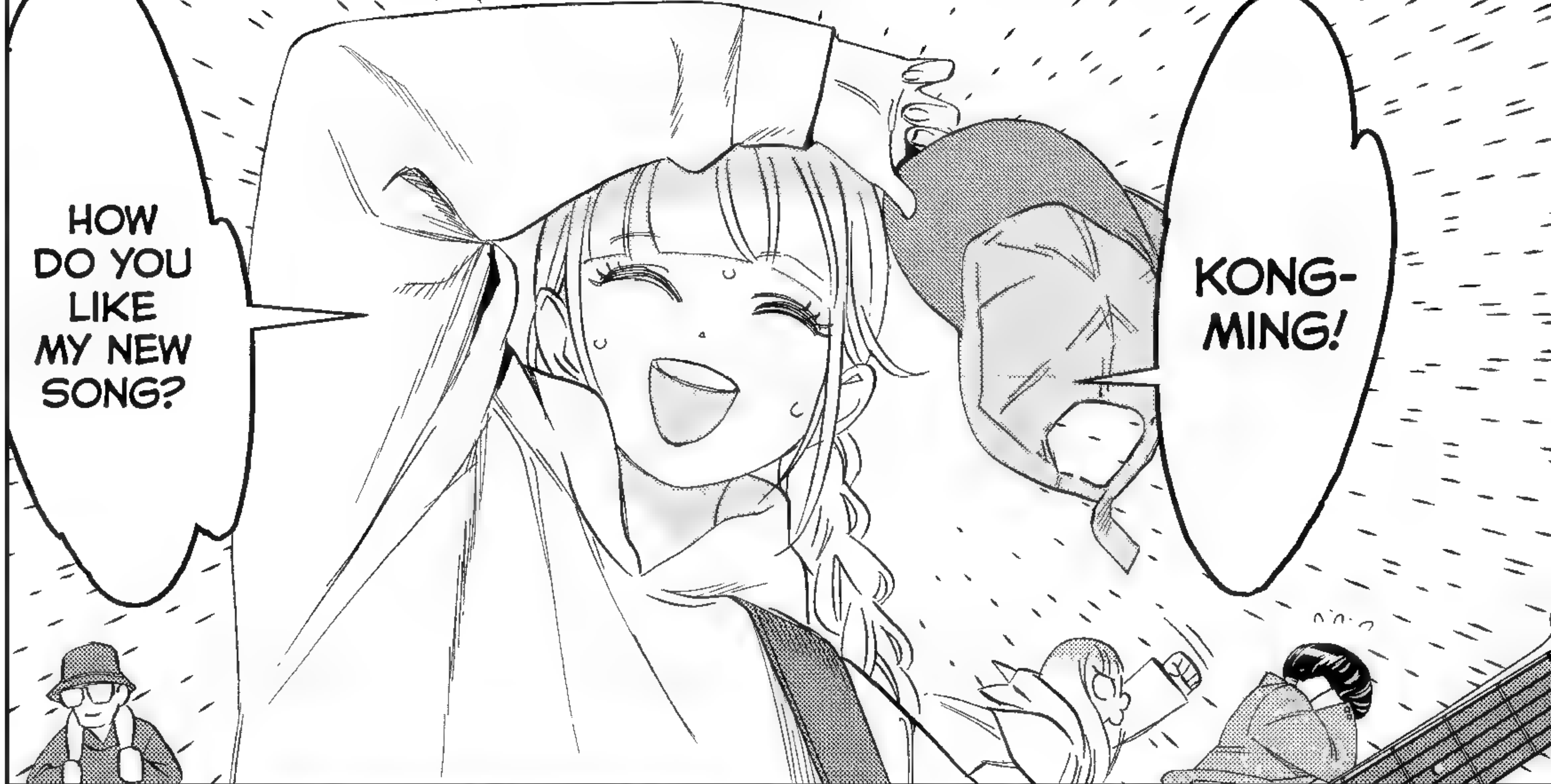


1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!









HOW  
DO YOU  
LIKE  
MY NEW  
SONG?

KONG-  
MING!



WE ARE  
MARCHING  
SMOOTHLY  
DOWN OUR  
WARPATH.

GLUG  
GLUG  
GLUG

"STAR TRIP"  
IS VERY CLOSE  
TO CEMENTING  
FOURTH  
KINGDOM'S  
VALUE AS  
A LABEL, AS  
WELL...

THE  
SONG YOU  
MADE WITH  
OSHIKARU  
WAS PHE-  
NOMENAL.



RE-  
GARDING  
THAT...

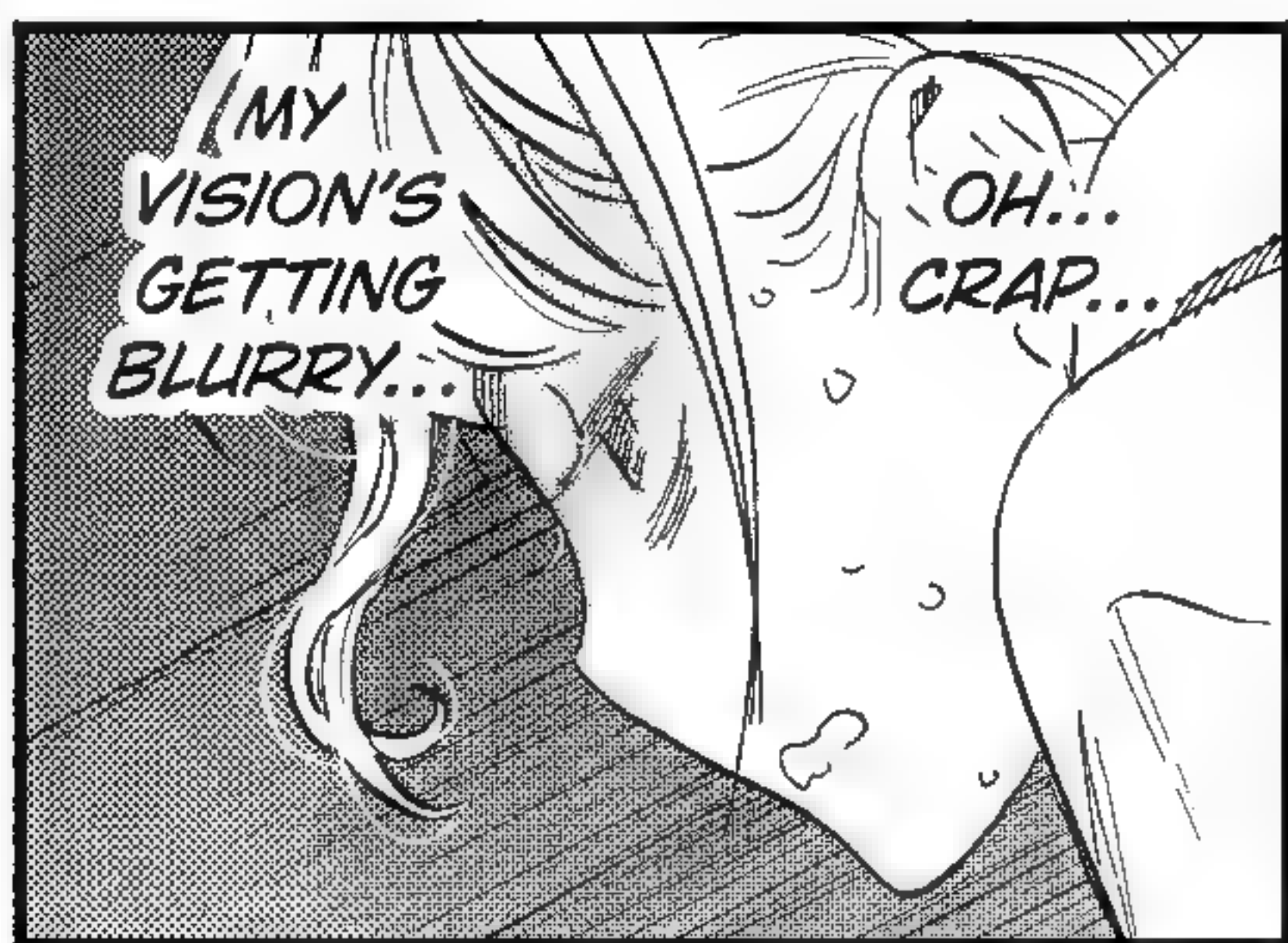
SORRY!  
I GOTTA  
HOLE  
MYSELF  
UP IN THE  
STUDIO.  
I'LL LEAVE  
THE REST  
TO YOU,  
OKAY?



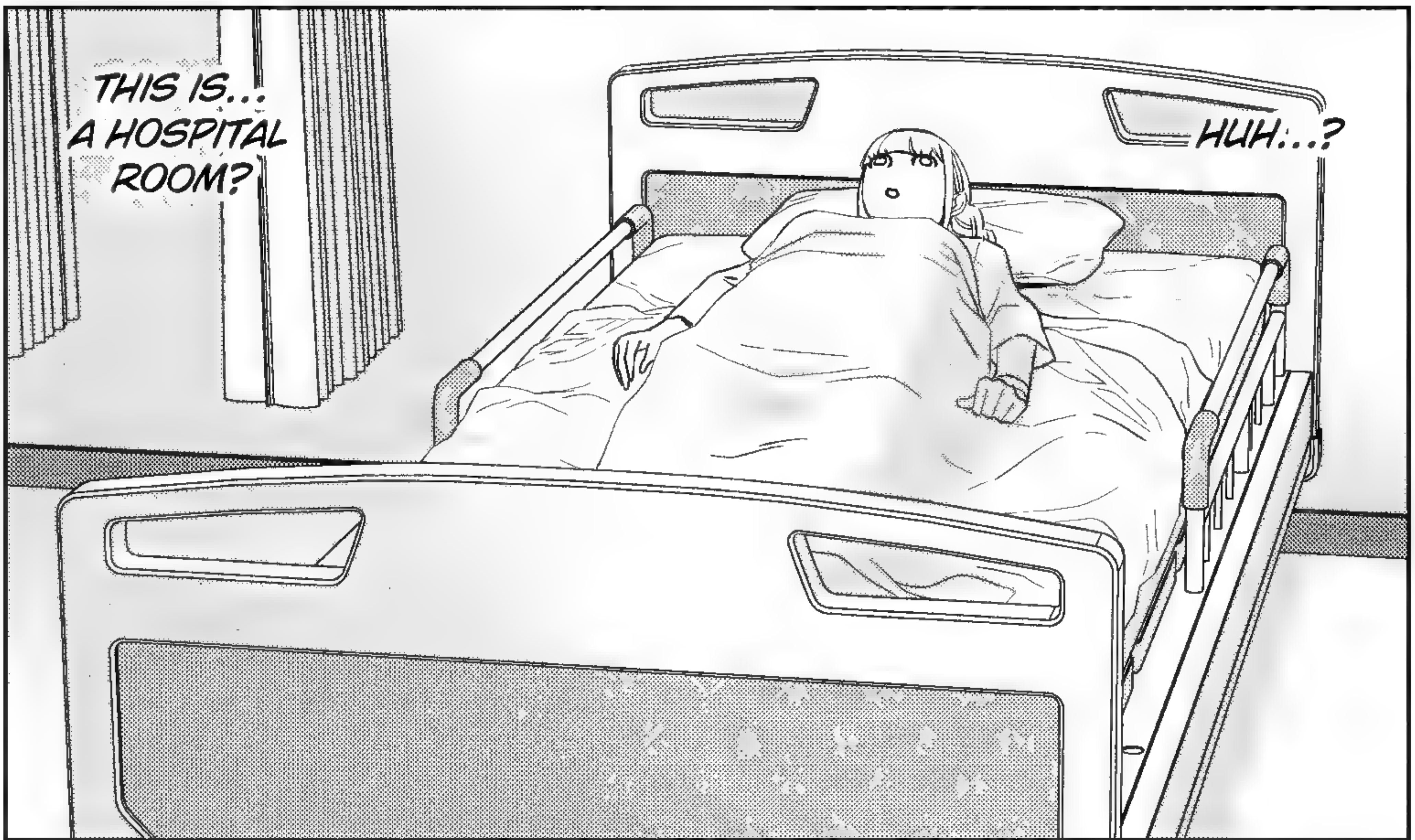
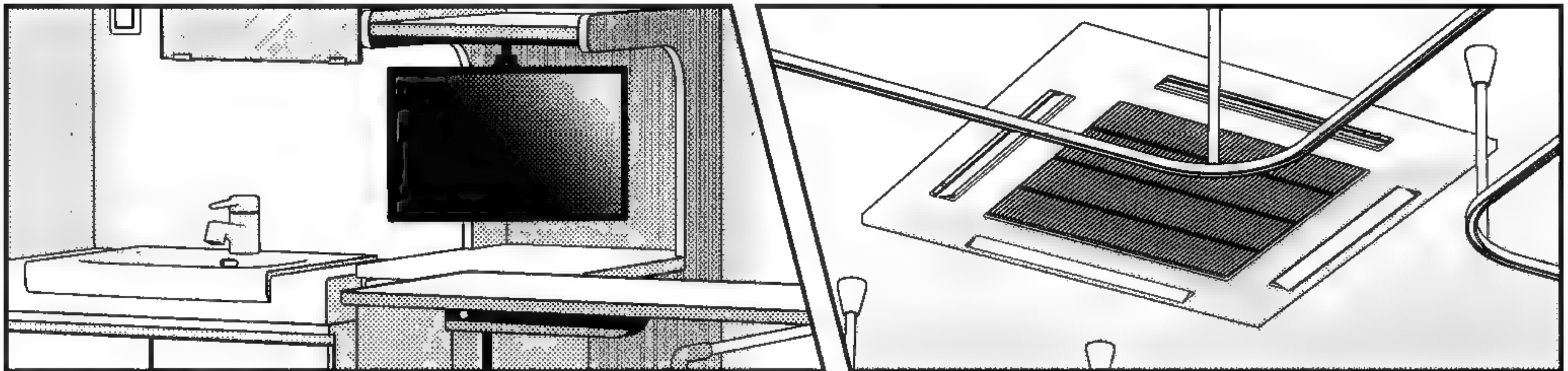
TIME'S  
RUNNING OUT.  
WE BETTER  
FIGURE  
OUT THOSE  
SONGS  
SOON!

I JUST  
NEED TWO MORE  
ORIGINAL SONGS  
BEFORE SUMMER  
SONIA...













AM I STILL  
DREAMING  
?!

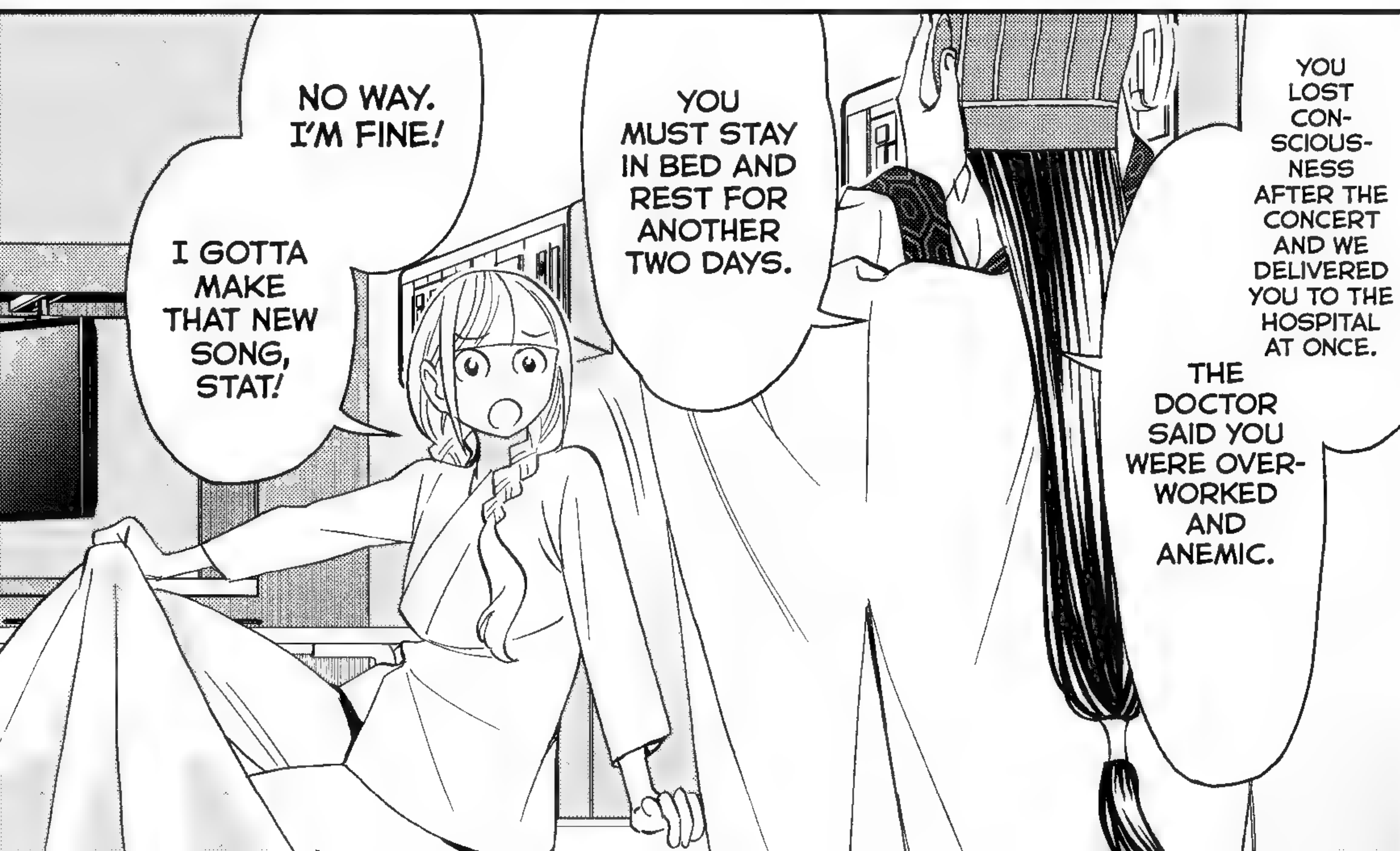
HOW  
DO YOU  
FARE, MY  
LADY?!



GOODNESS...  
HE'S BEEN  
SO WORRIED  
ABOUT YOU.

WHAT'RE  
YOU  
DOING,  
KONG-  
MING?!

NO  
WAIT,  
THIS IS  
REAL!



NO WAY.  
I'M FINE!

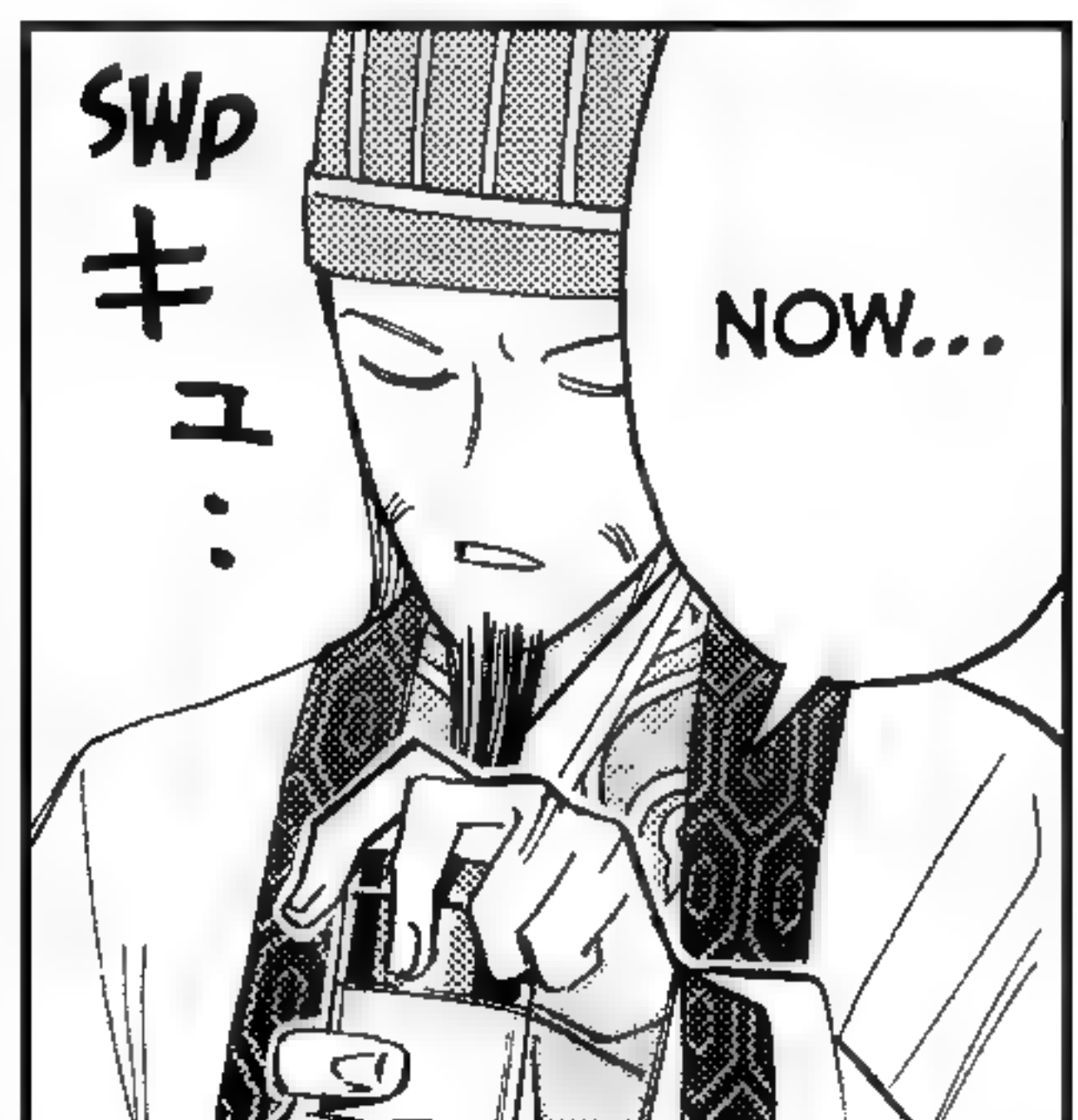
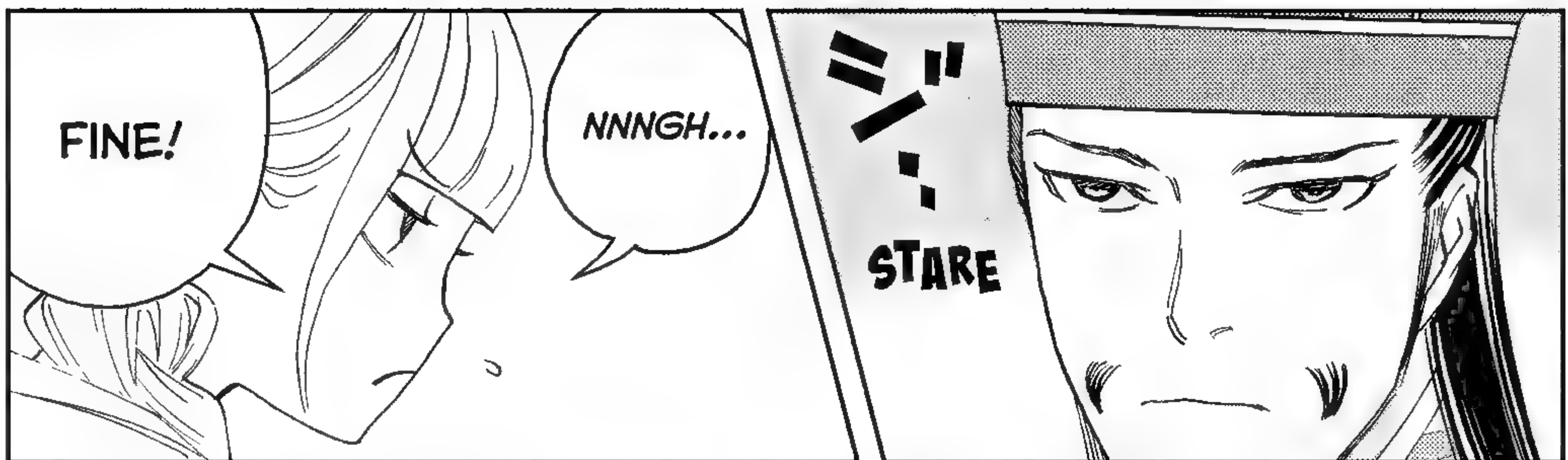
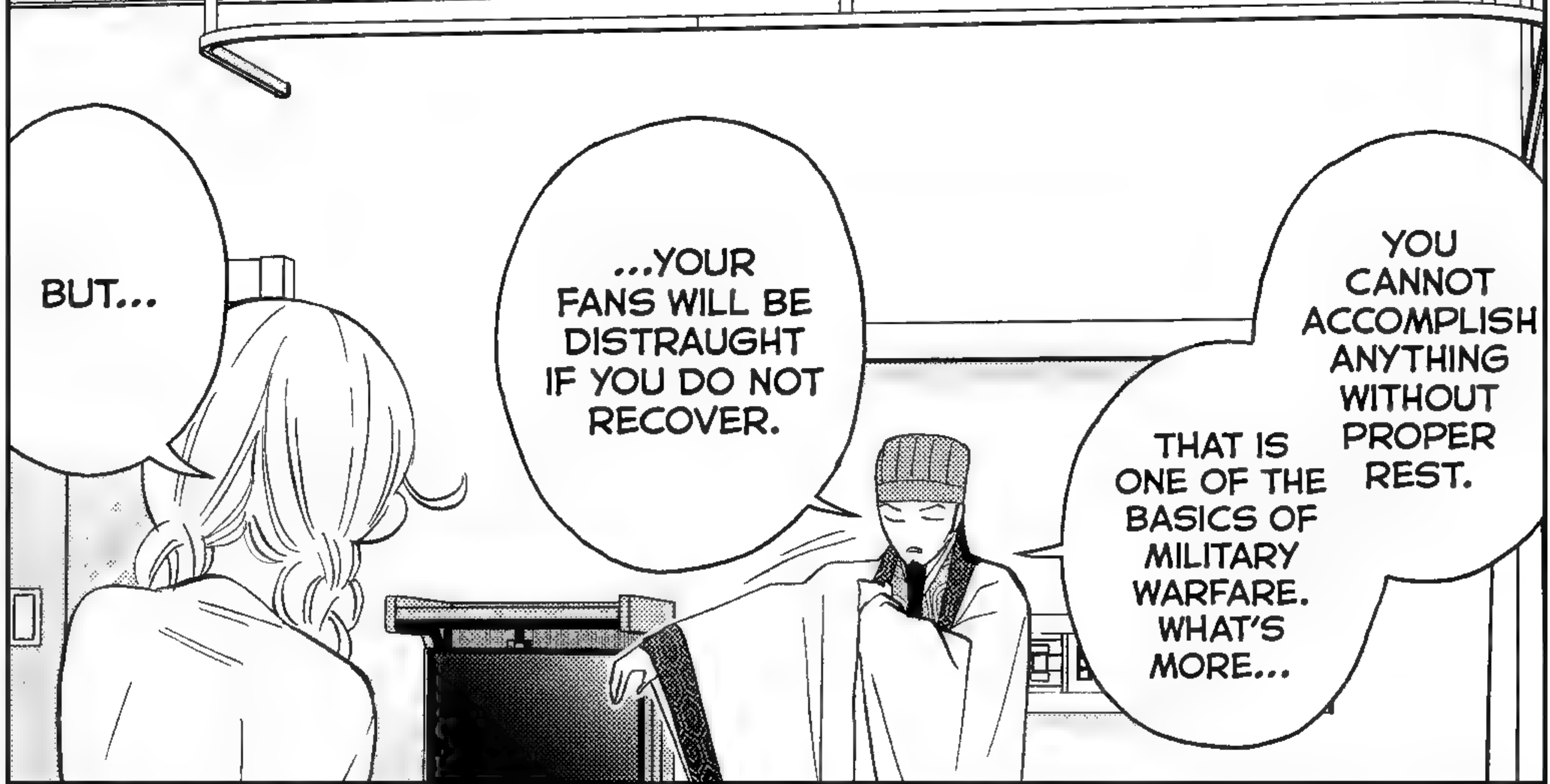
I GOTTA  
MAKE  
THAT NEW  
SONG,  
STAT!

YOU  
MUST STAY  
IN BED AND  
REST FOR  
ANOTHER  
TWO DAYS.

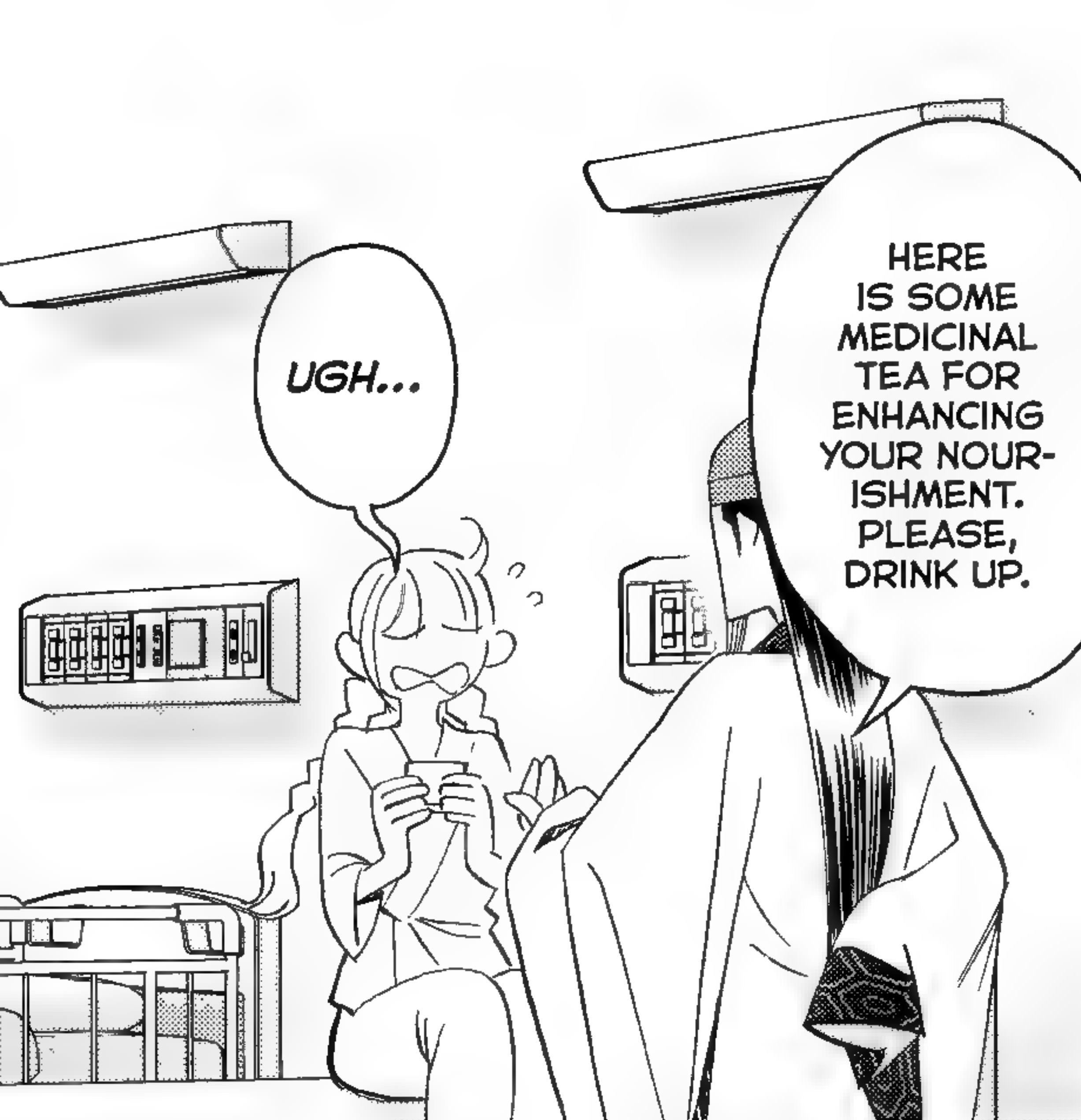
YOU  
LOST  
CON-  
SCIOUS-  
NESS  
AFTER THE  
CONCERT  
AND WE  
DELIVERED  
YOU TO THE  
HOSPITAL  
AT ONCE.

THE  
DOCTOR  
SAID YOU  
WERE OVER-  
WORKED  
AND  
ANEMIC.

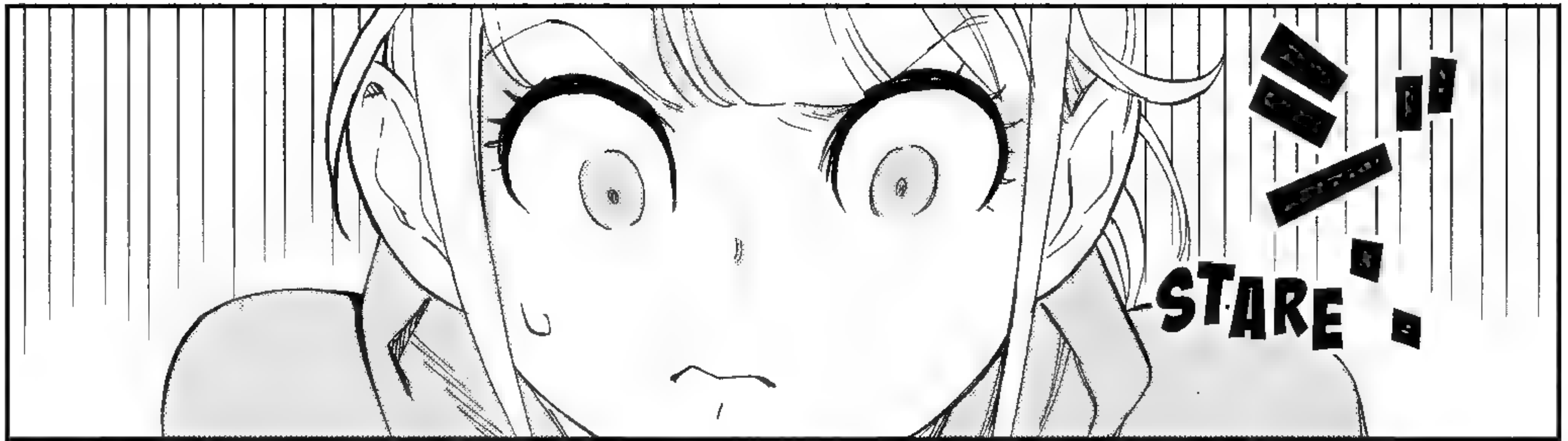








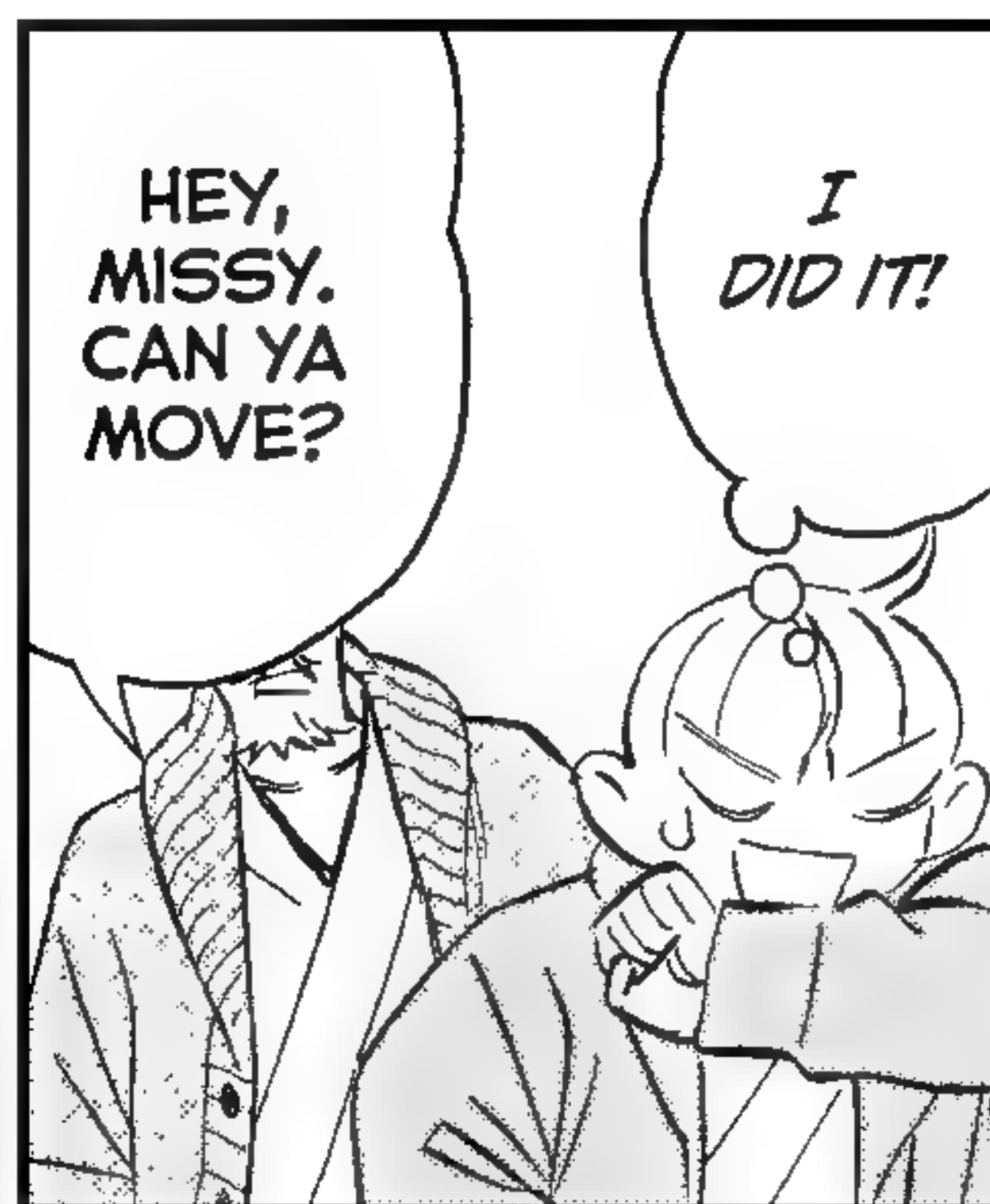








THREE  
SUPER-  
SIZED CHIKI-  
CHICKENS  
AND ONE  
CORN DOG...  
OH, AND  
A PIZZA  
MANJU,  
THANKS.



HEY,  
MISSY.  
CAN YA  
MOVE?

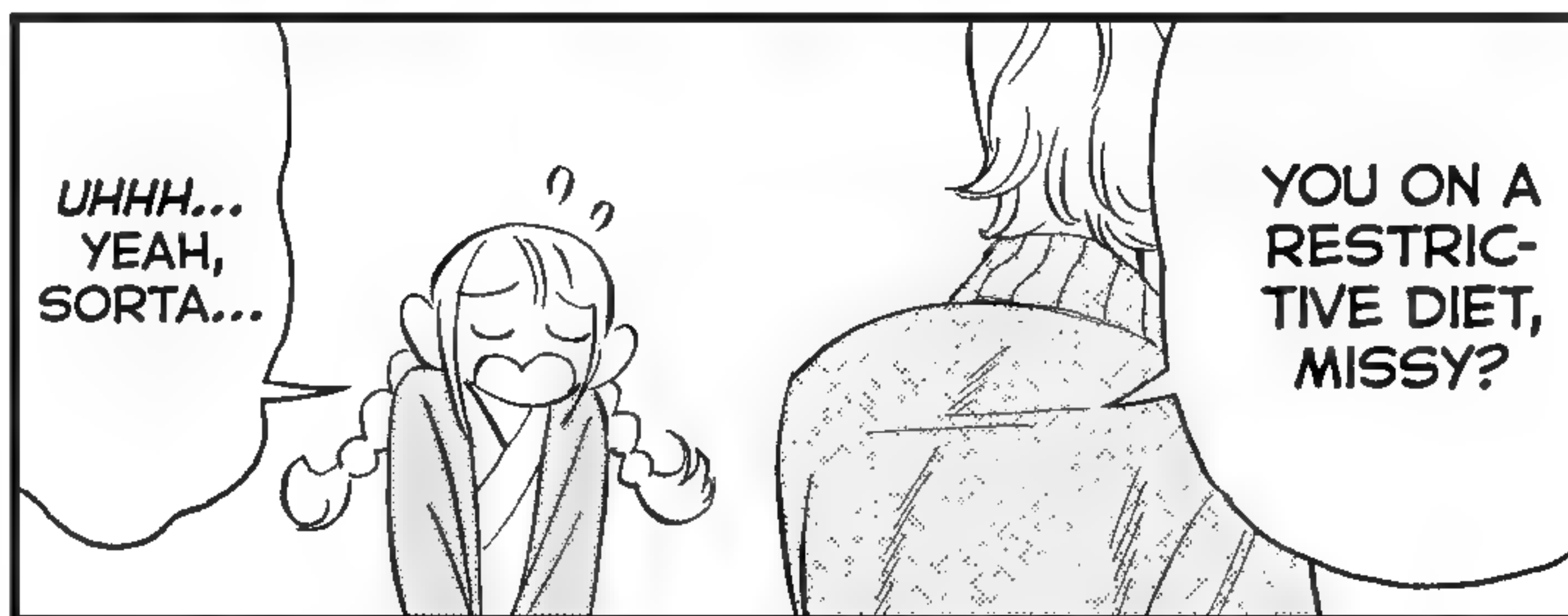
I  
DID IT!



YOU'RE  
SO  
YOUNG,  
TOO.  
THAT'S  
TOUGH.

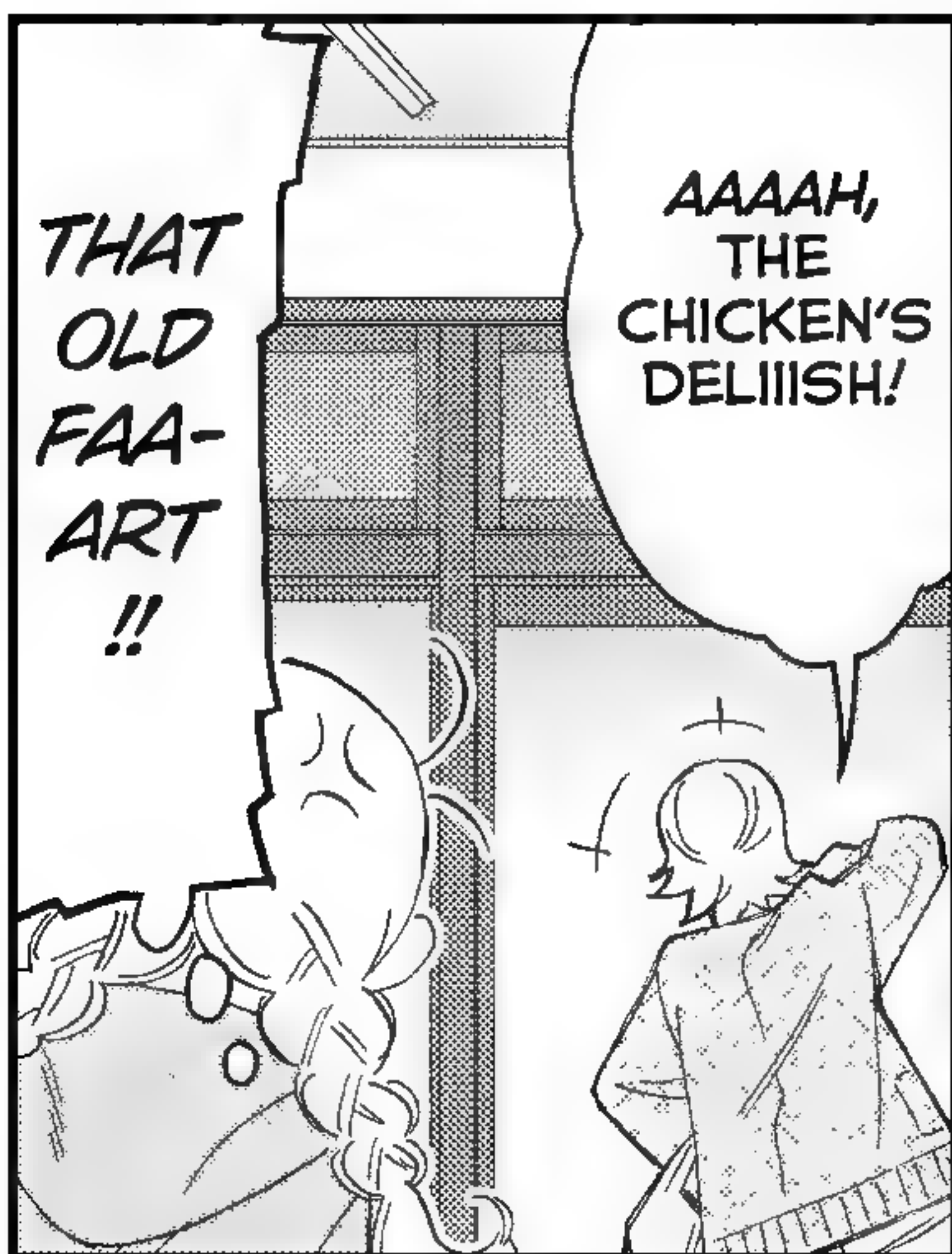
RUSTLE

HUH.



UHHH...  
YEAH,  
SORTA...

YOU ON A  
RESTRIC-  
TIVE DIET,  
MISSY?



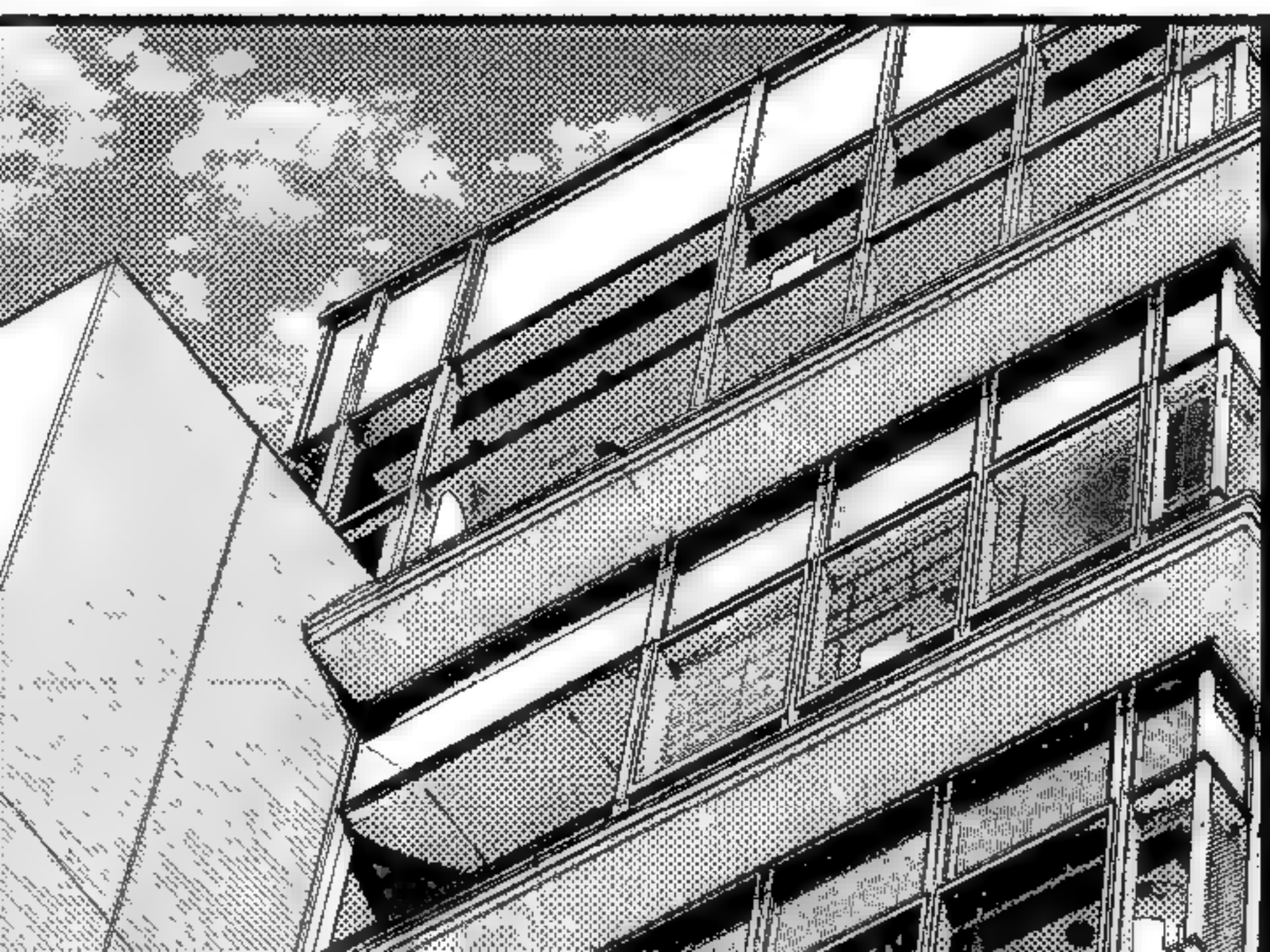
THAT  
OLD  
FAA-  
ART  
!!

AAAAH,  
THE  
CHICKEN'S  
DELIISH!

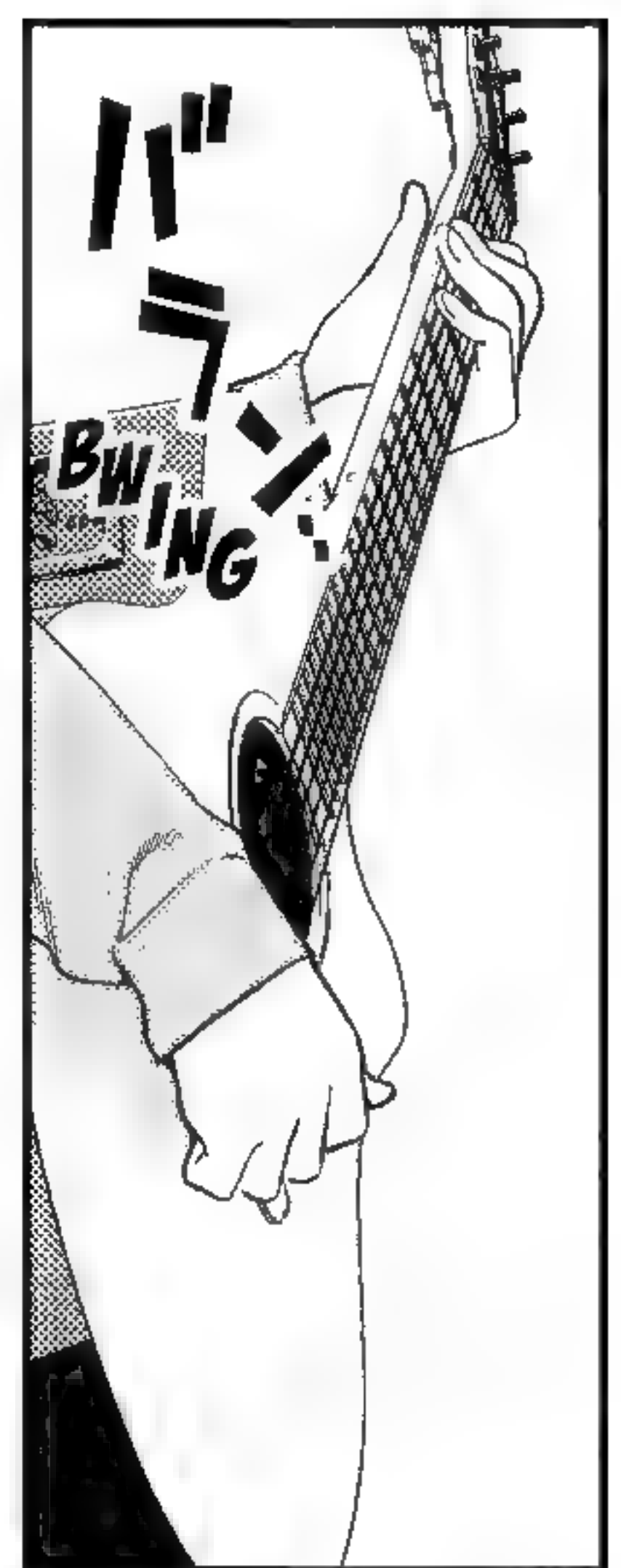
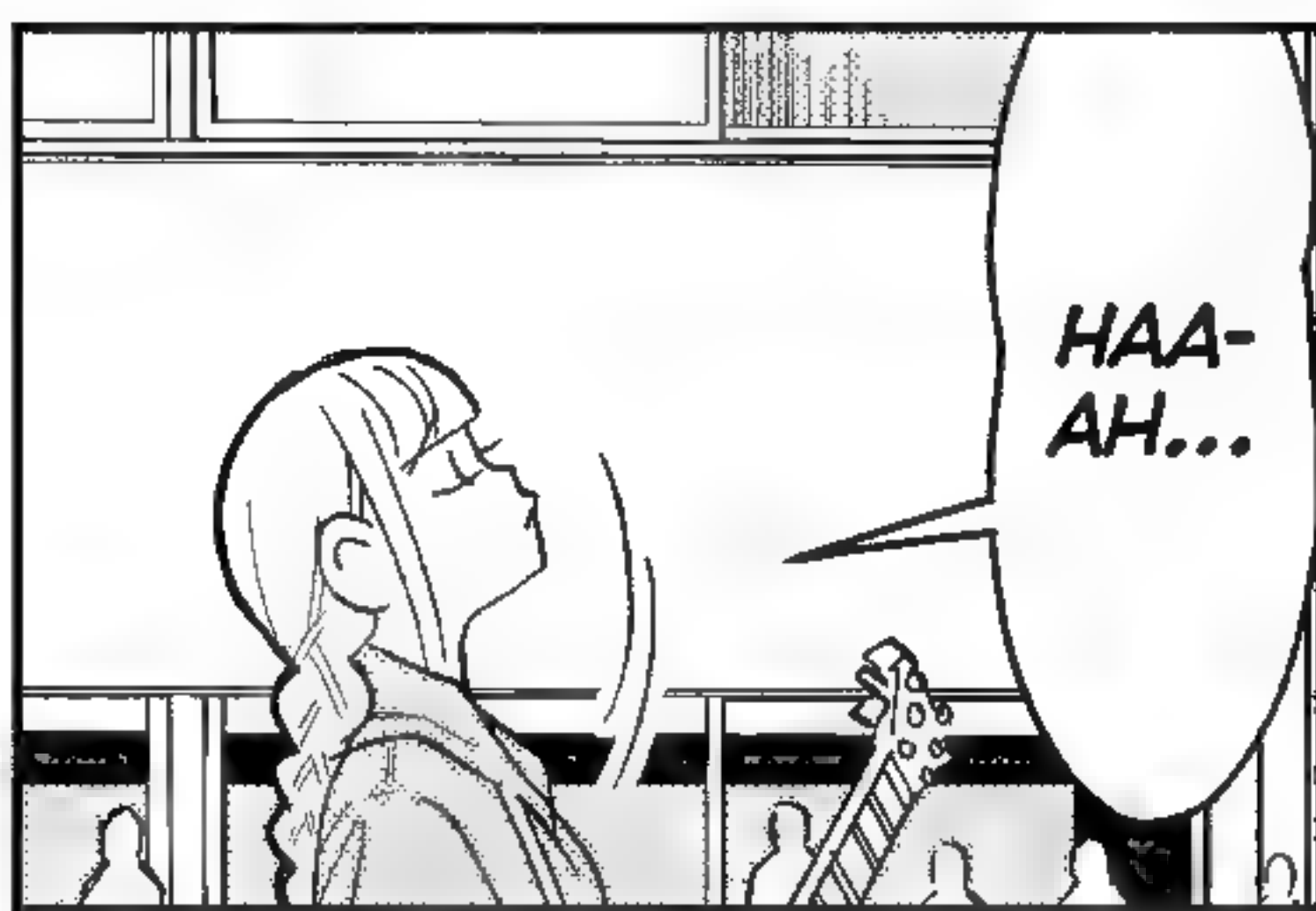
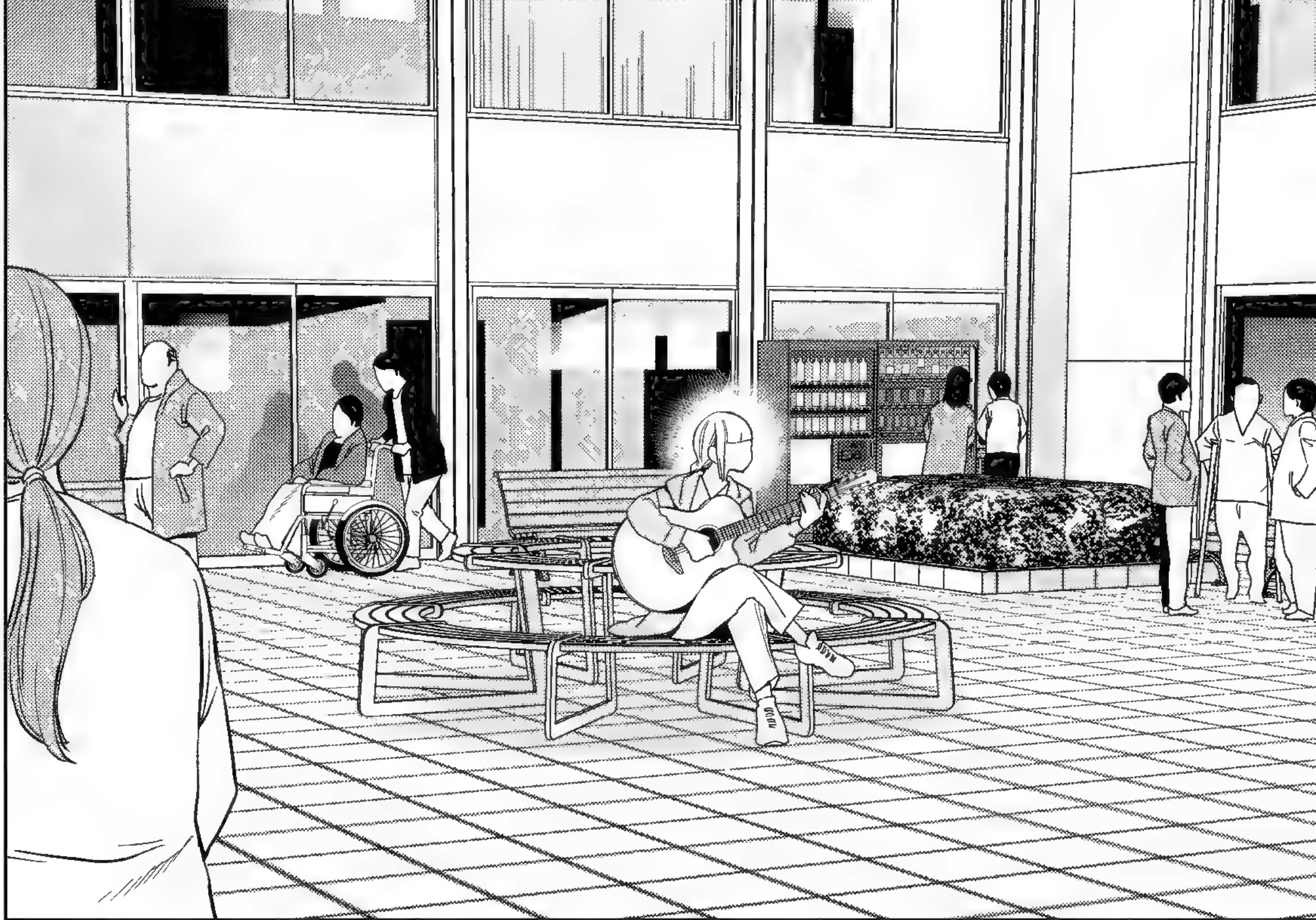


WELL,  
SUCKS  
TO BE  
YOU!

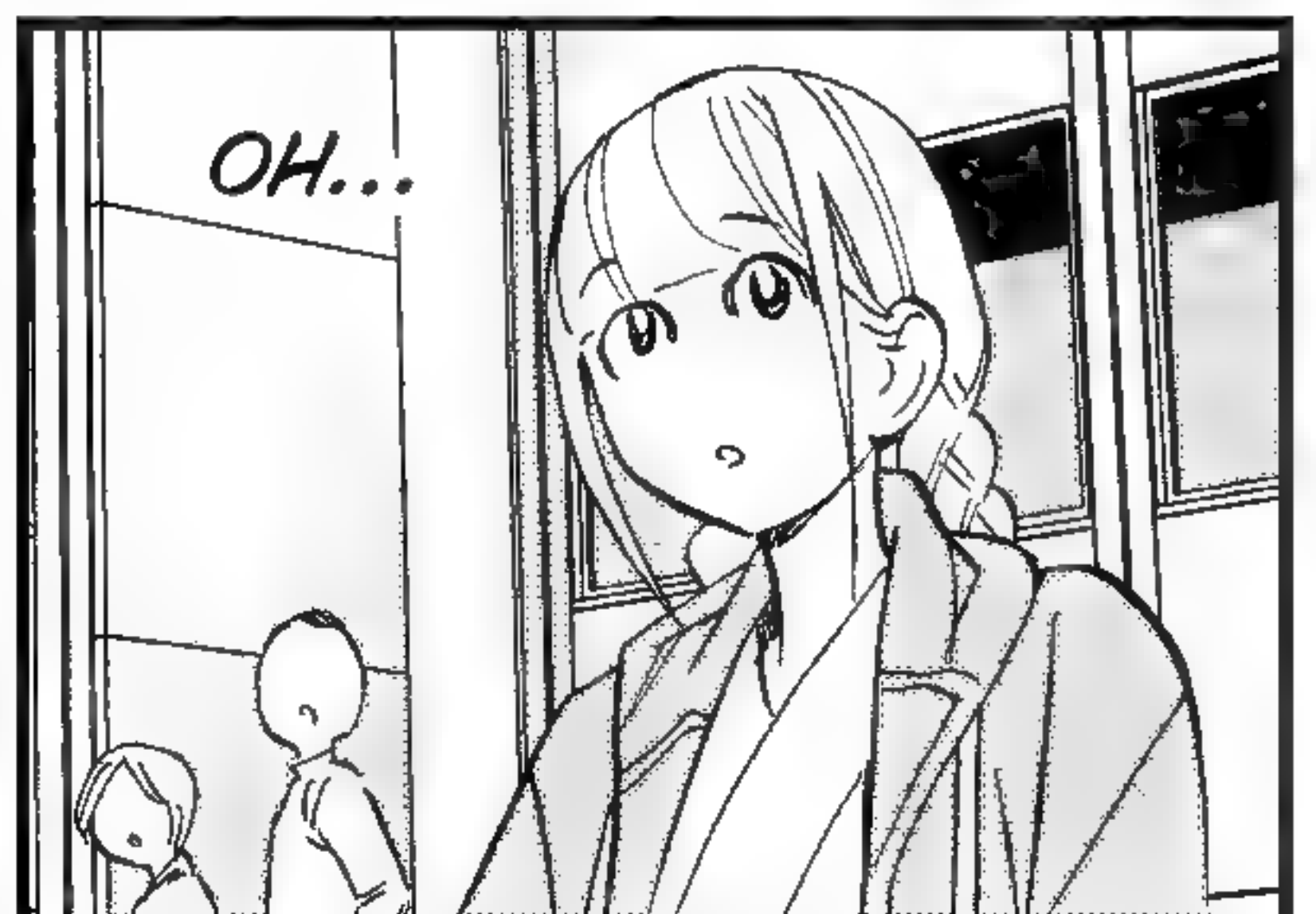
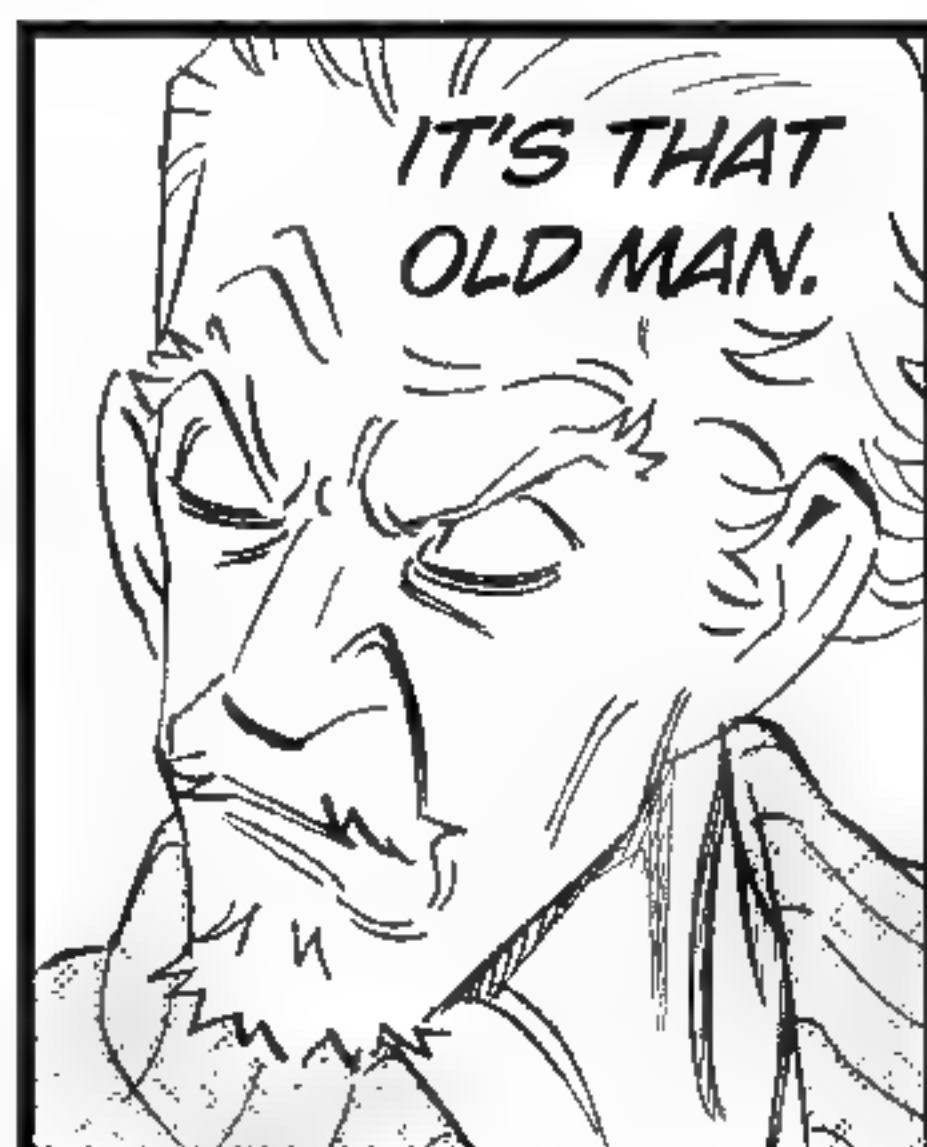
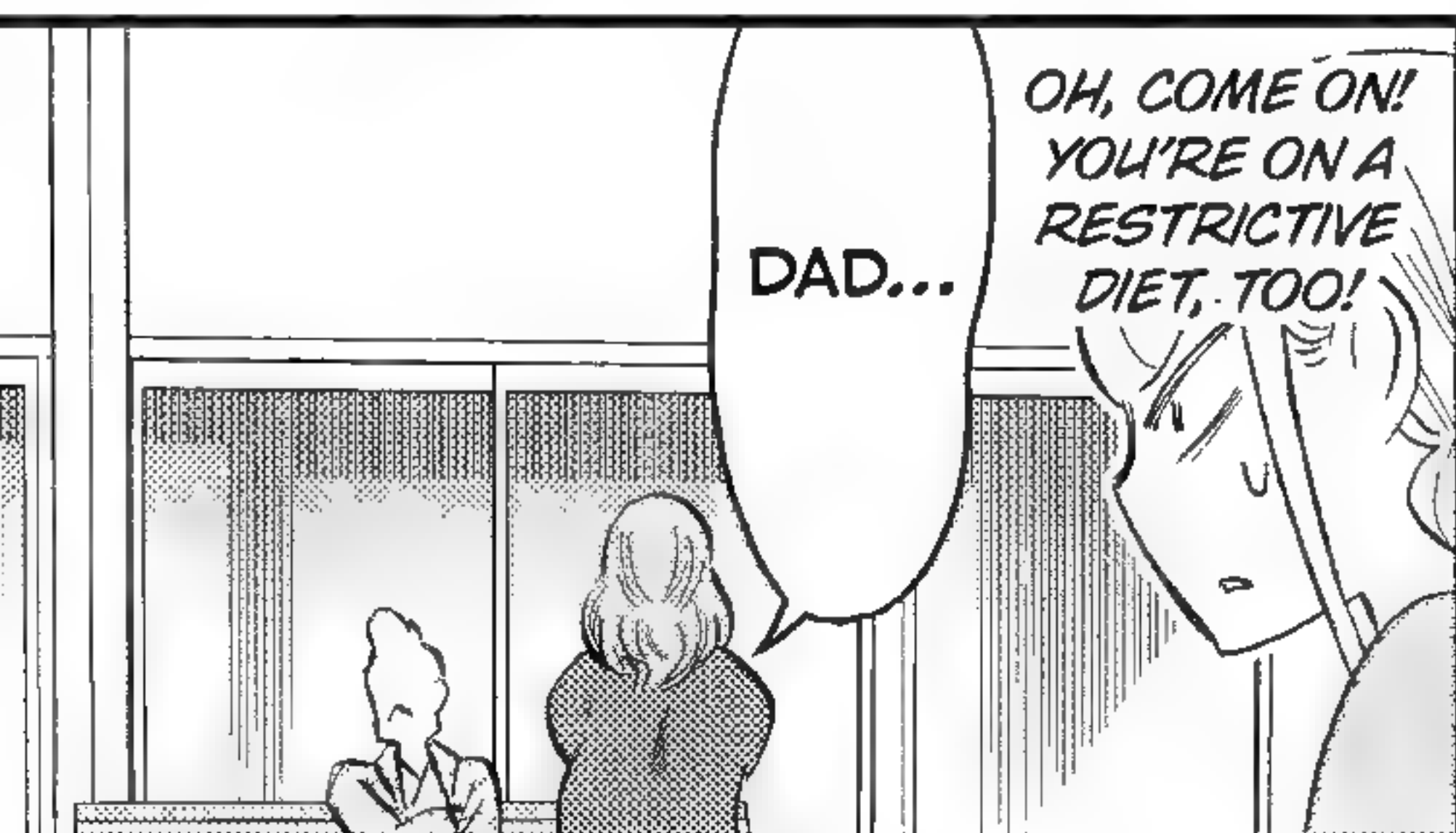
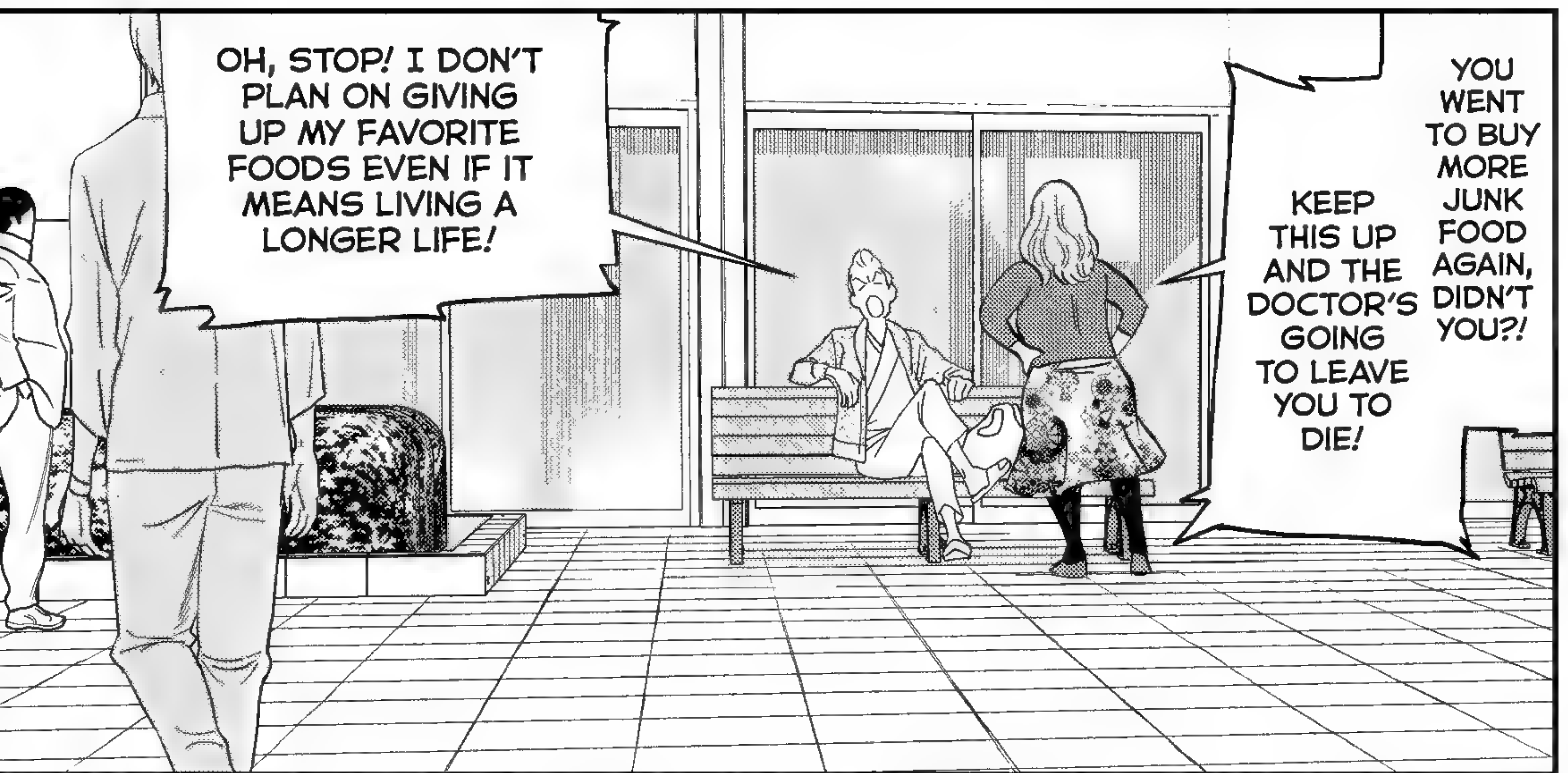
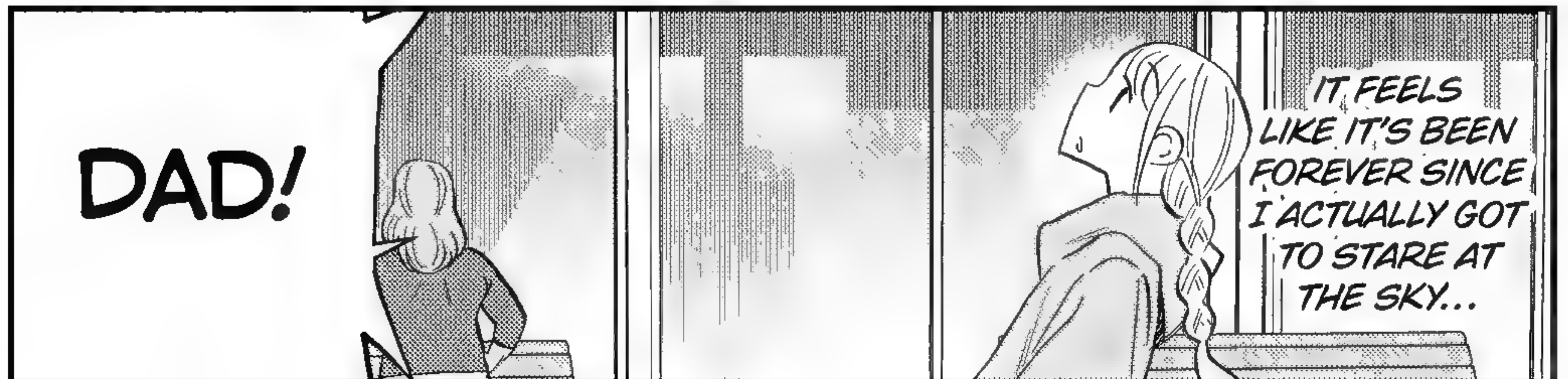
KR  
NCH



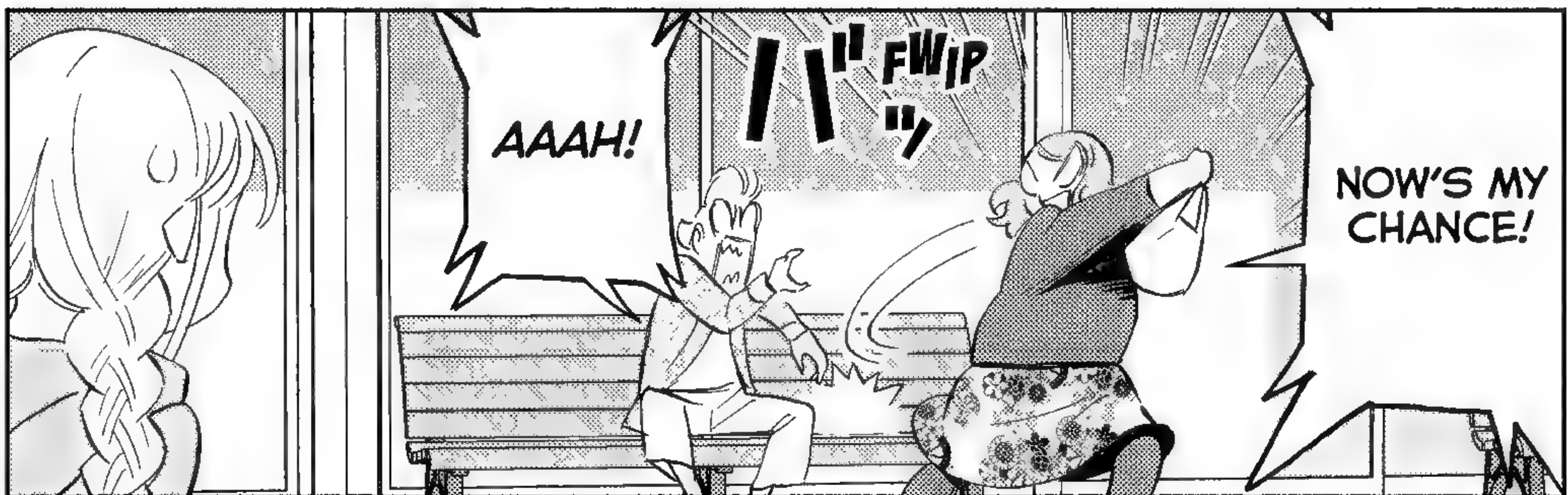
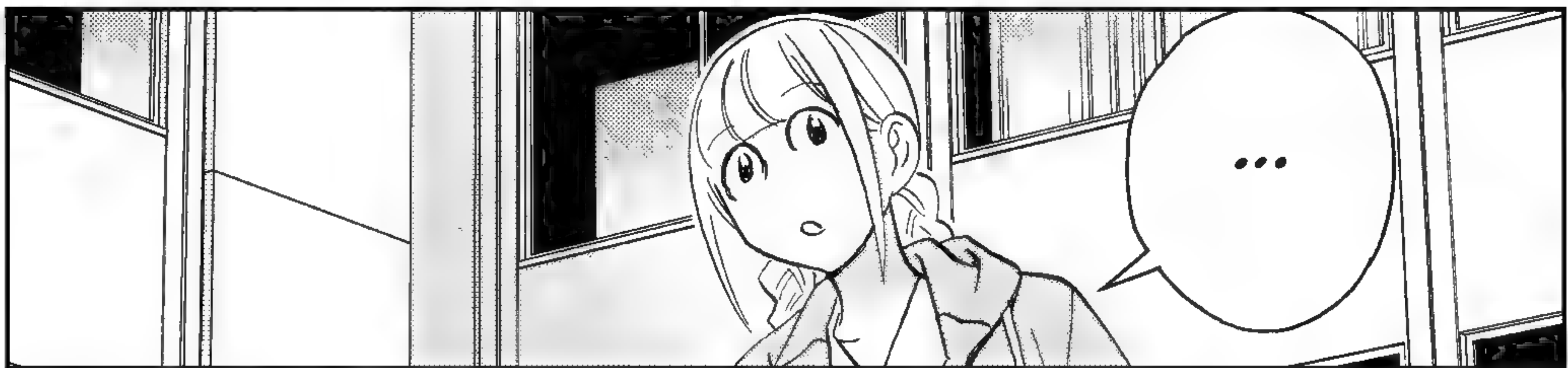




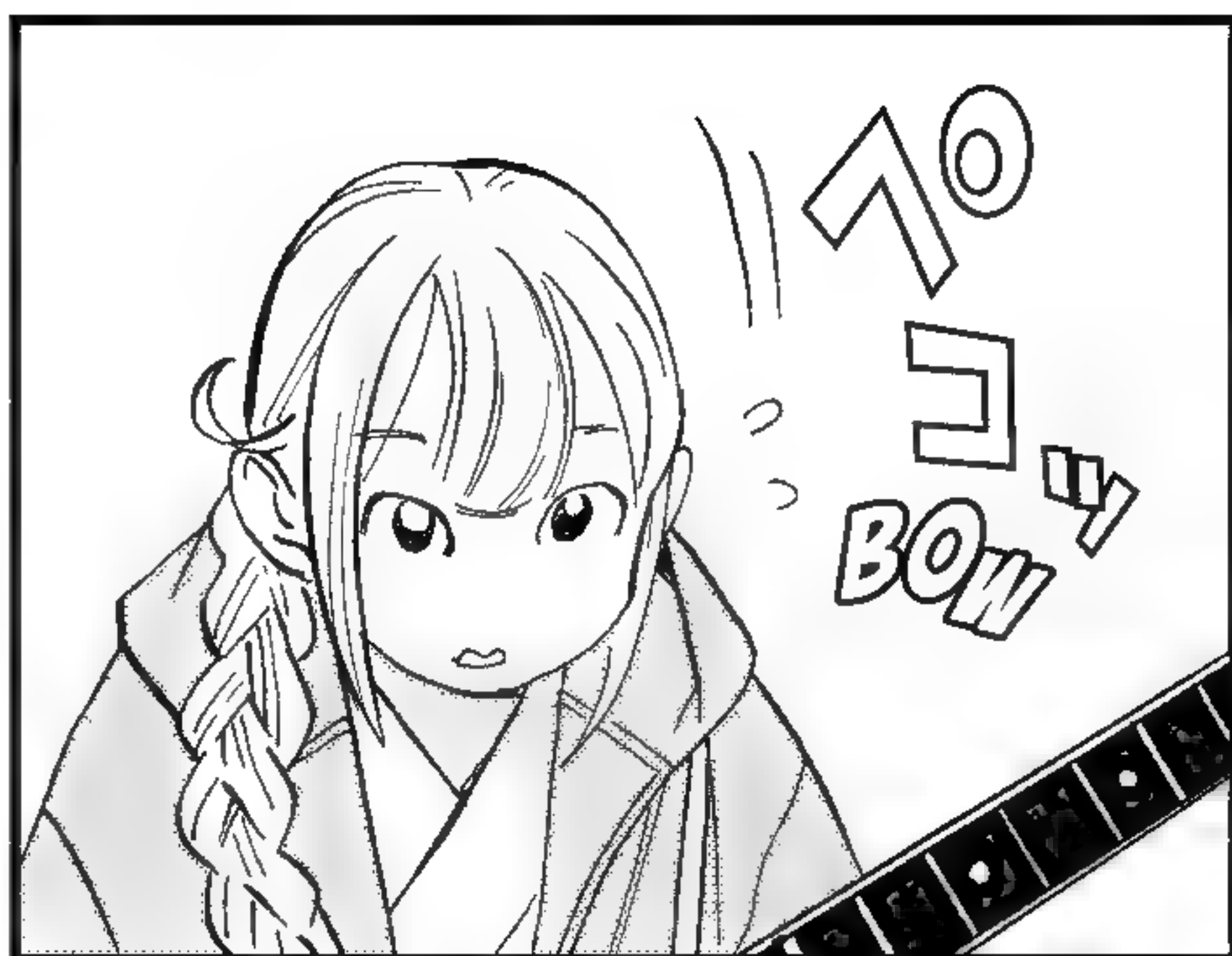




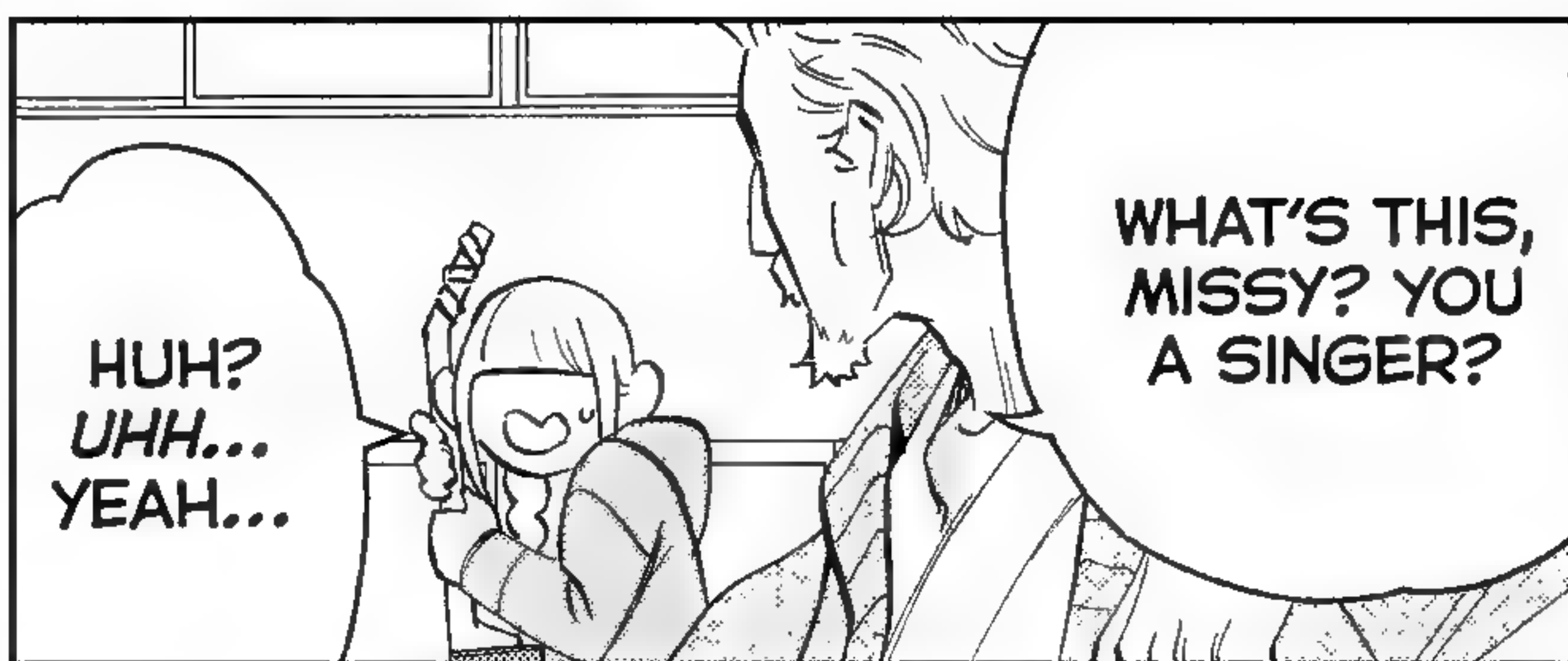




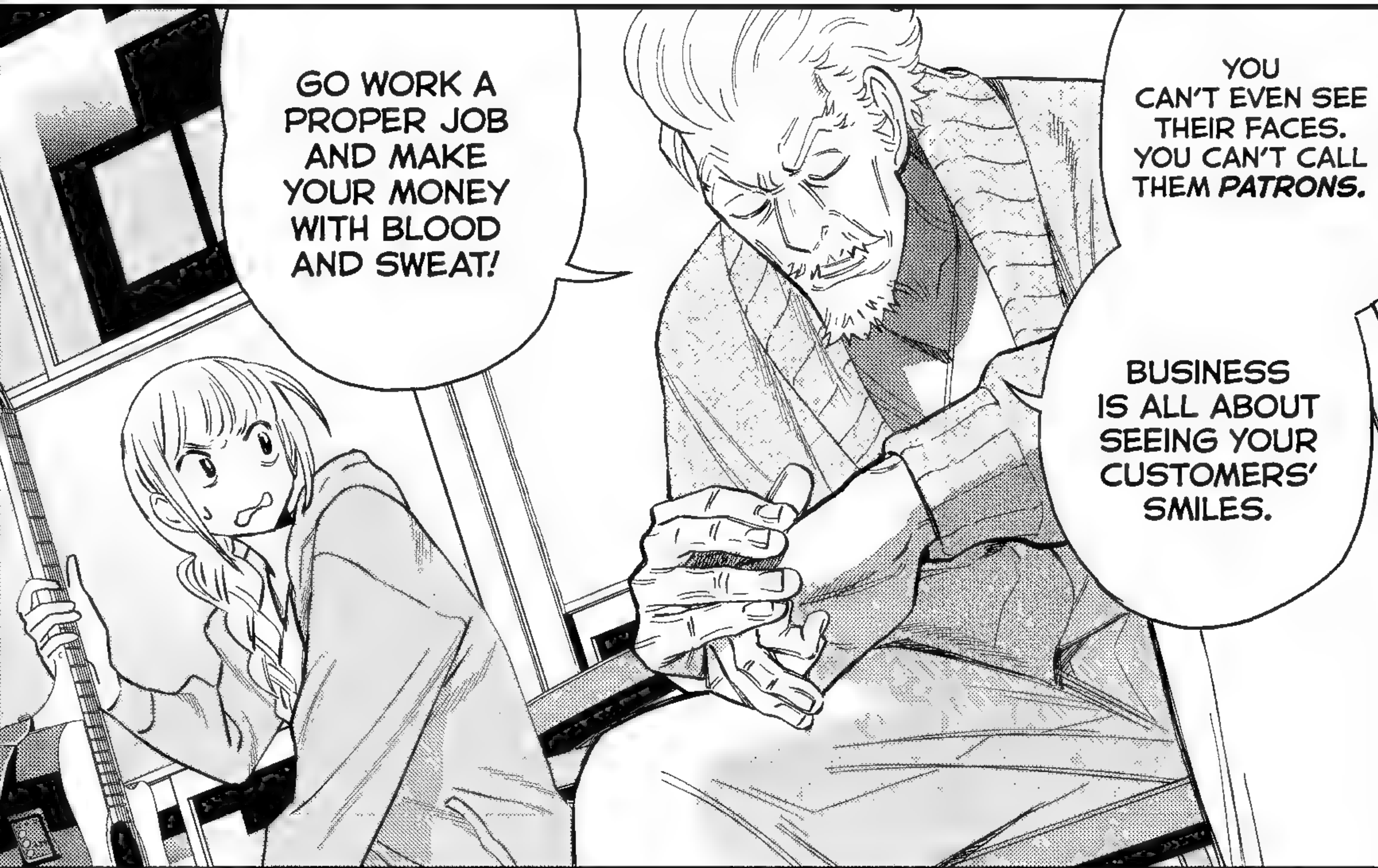
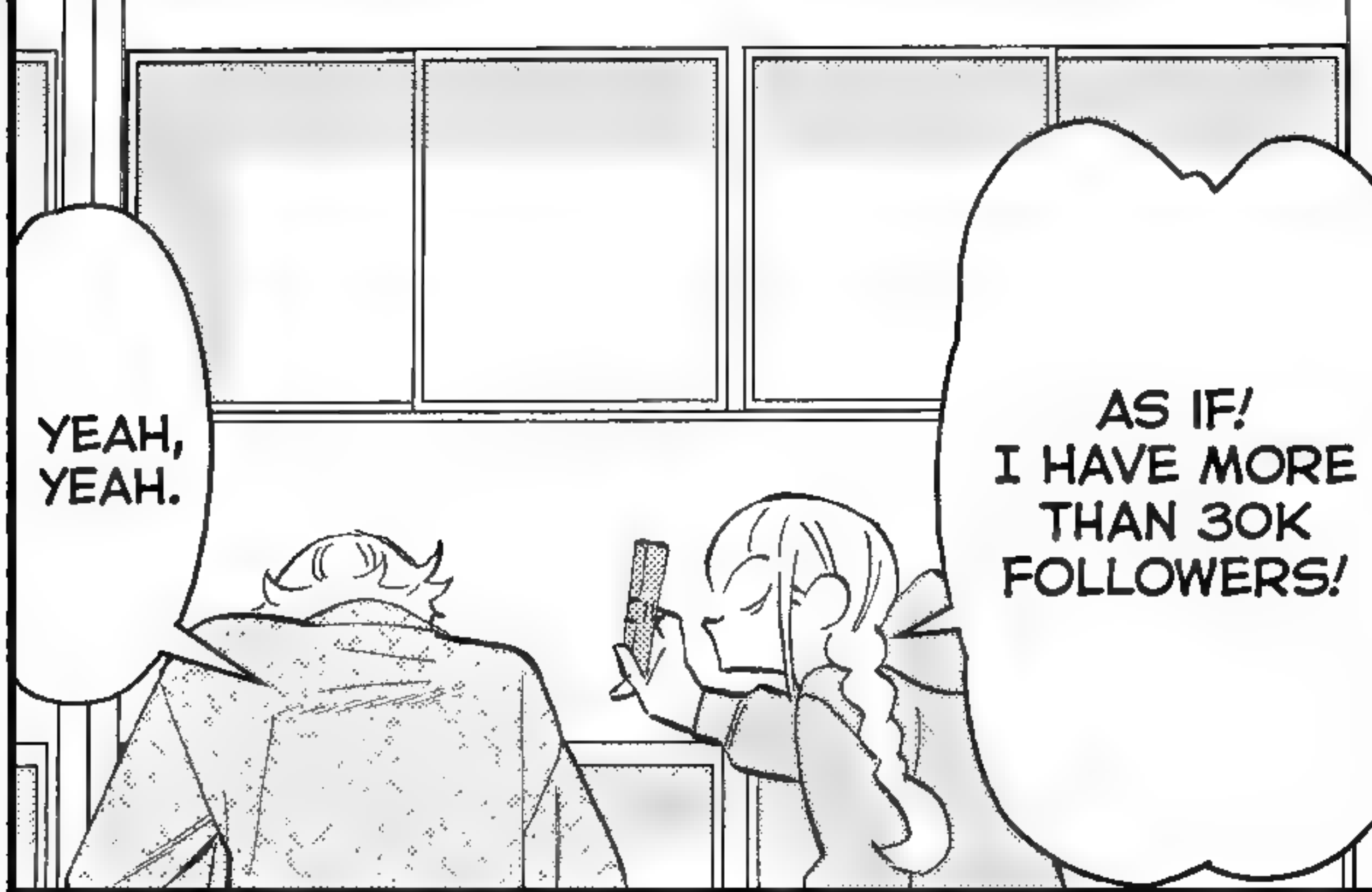




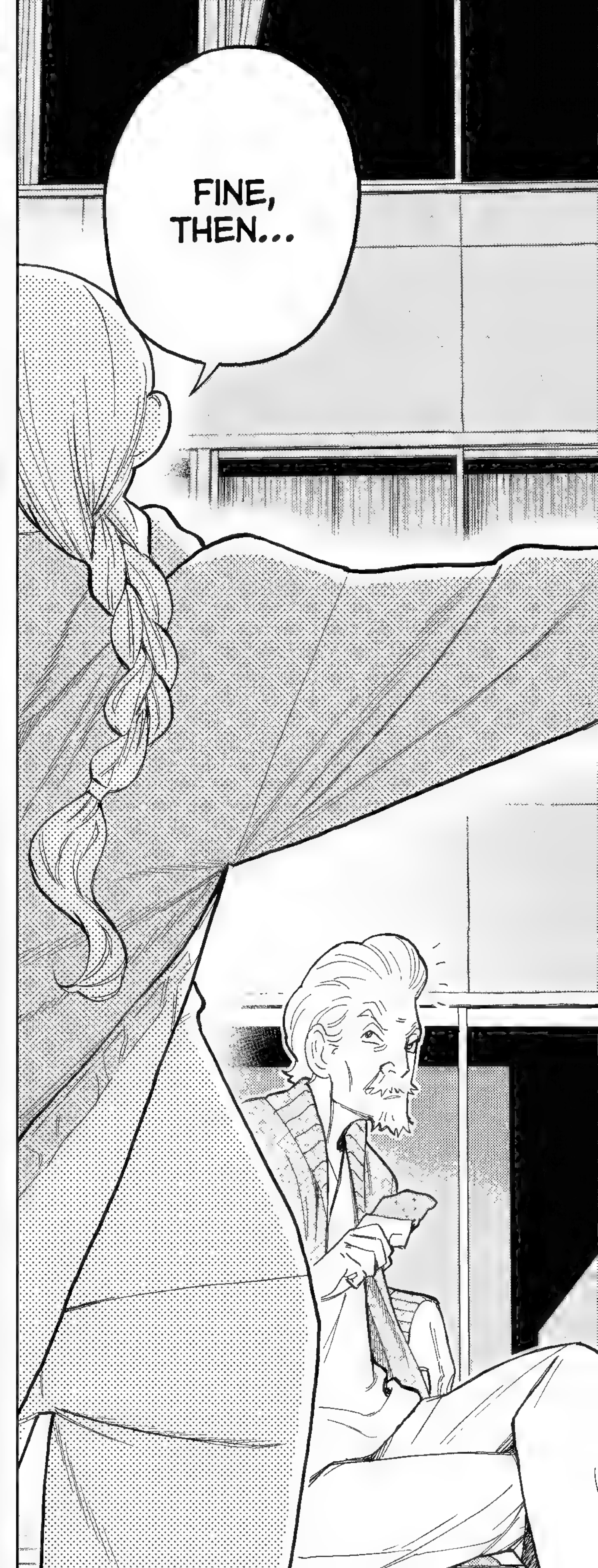








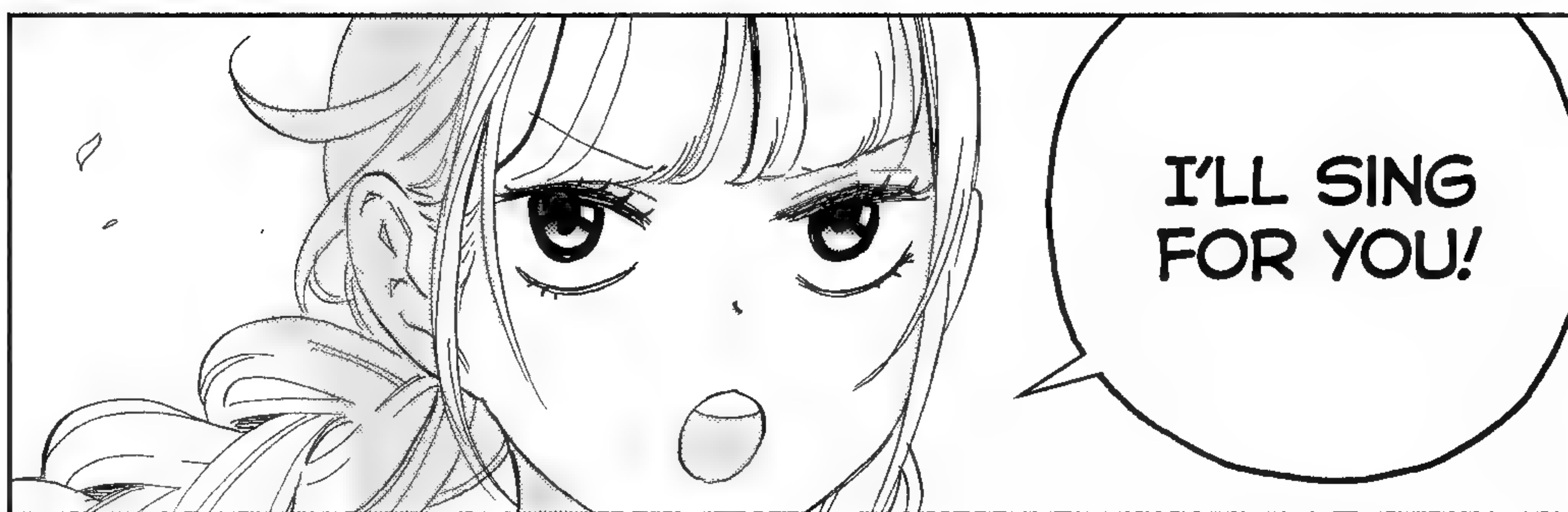




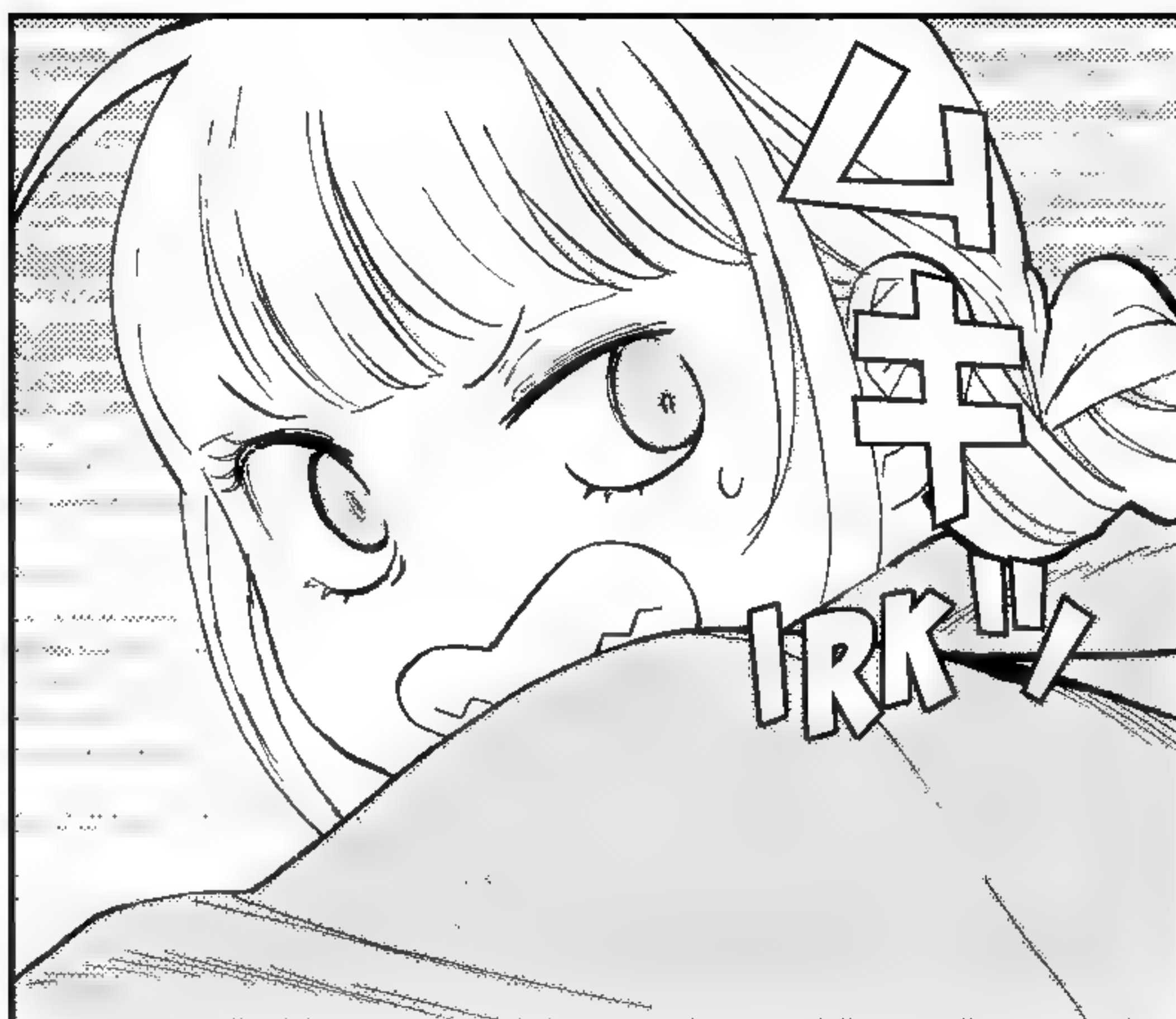


1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!

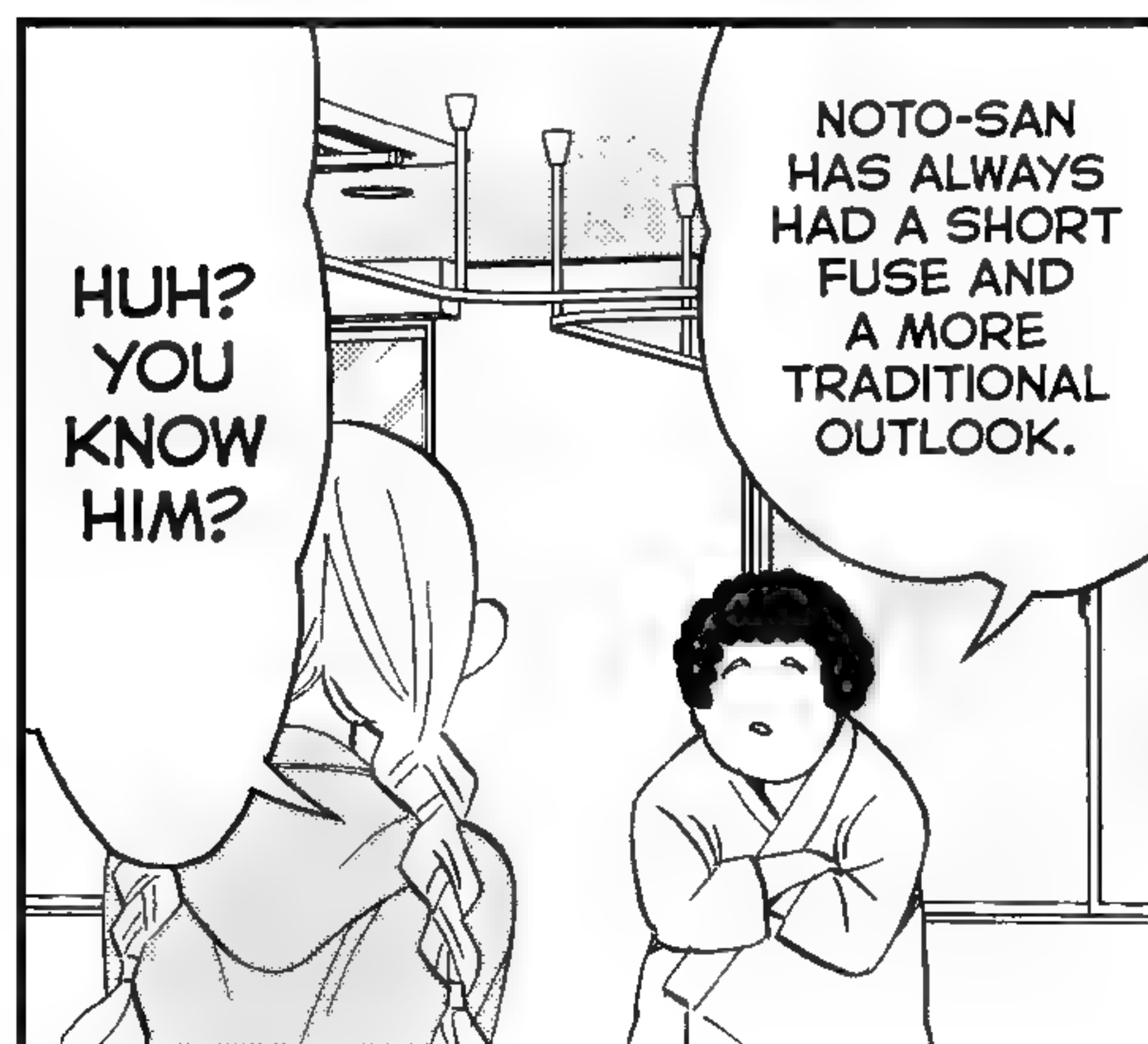
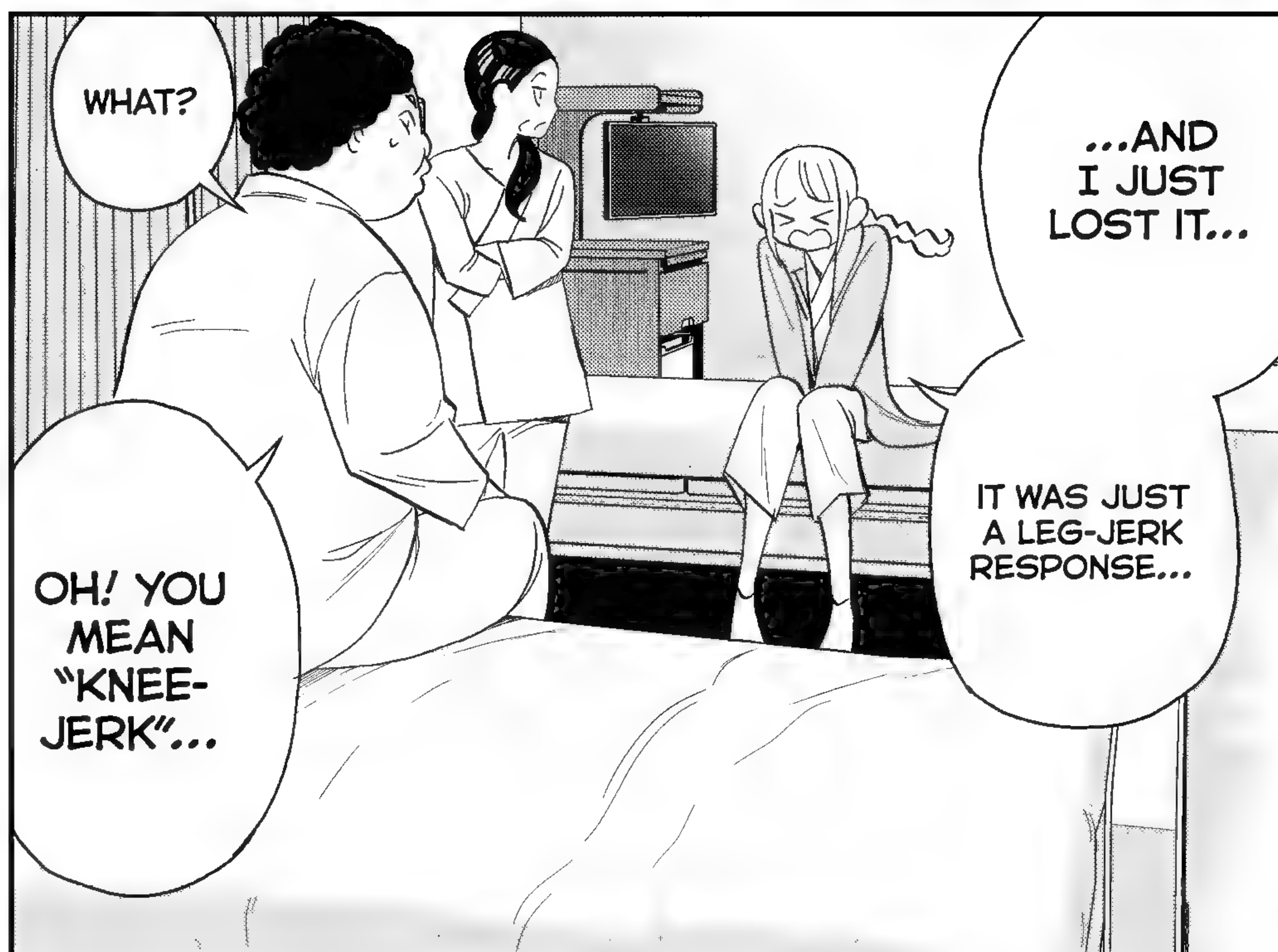
















OH!

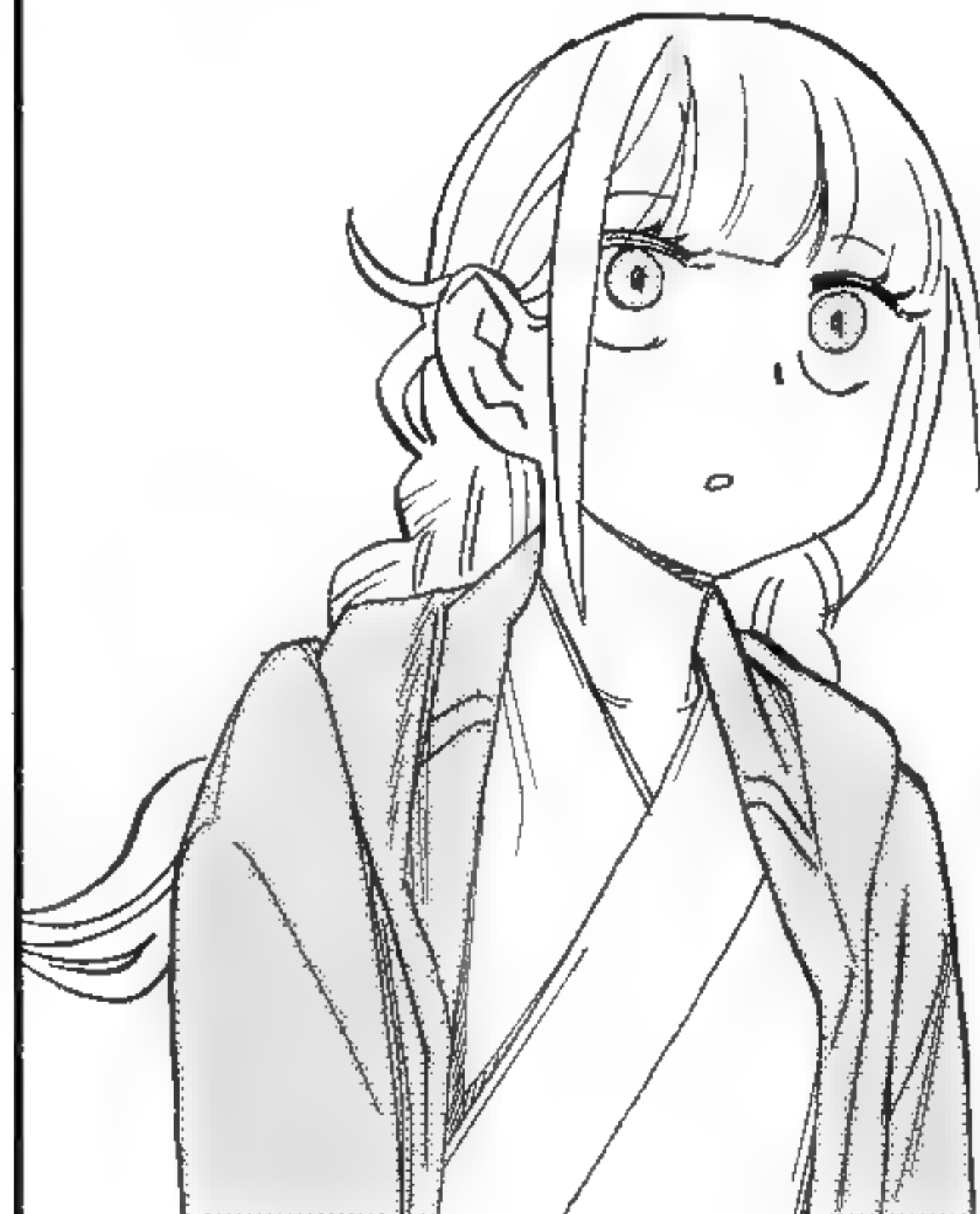
MAYBE HE'S LONELY...BUT BEFORE WE KNEW IT, HE BECAME ONE OF THOSE MEAN OLD MEN.

BEFORE THAT, HE WAS A LITTLE EASIER TO GET ALONG WITH.



WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU RIGHT NOW!

NOTO-SAN, NOTO-SAN!



LOOK! THIS IS NOTO-SAN'S WIFE! SHE'S A BEAUTY, ISN'T SHE?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?! YOU'RE BAD-MOUTHING ME, AREN'T YOU?!



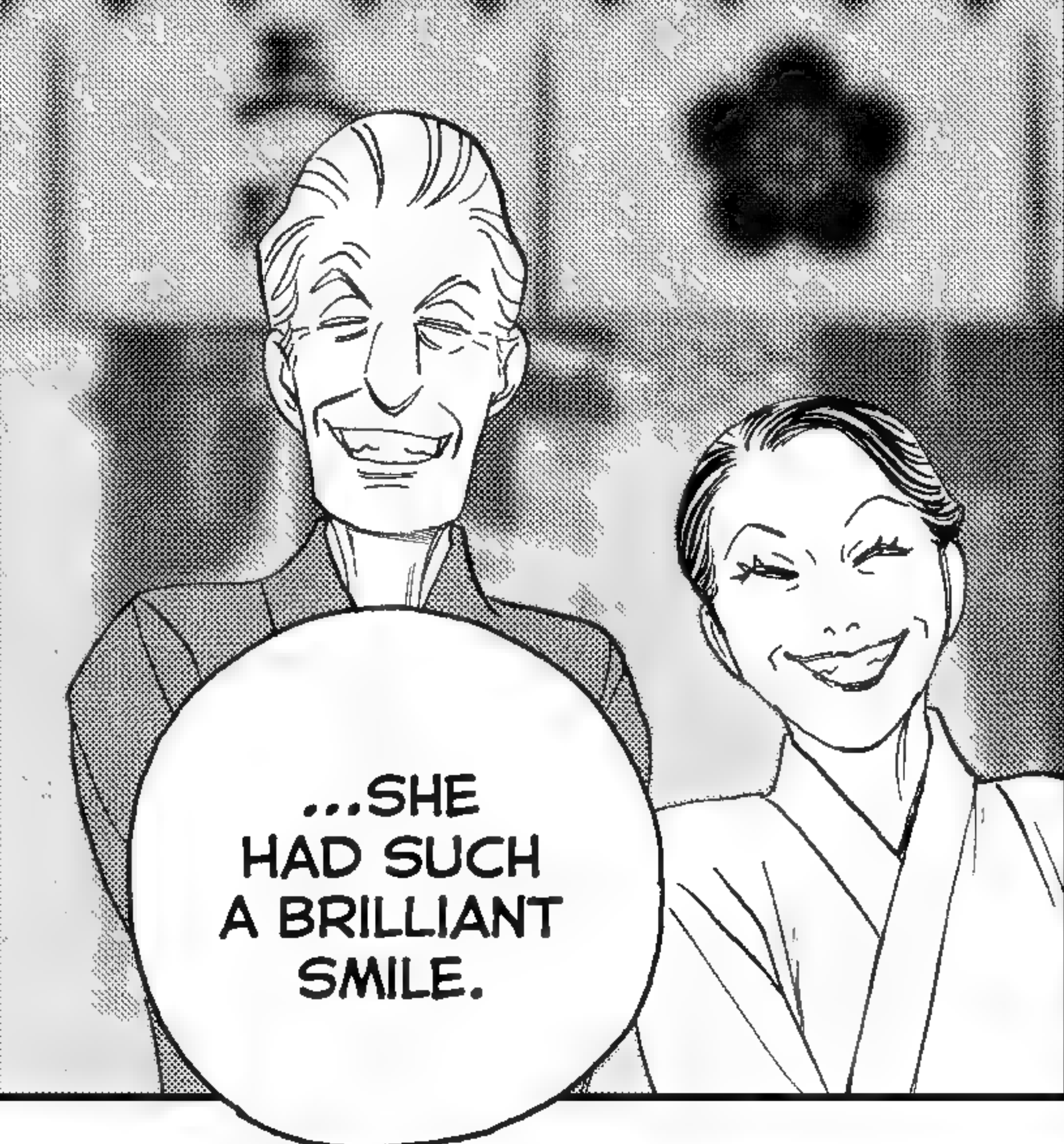
HUH...



MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS! STOP LOOKING AT HER!

WOW, SHE IS!





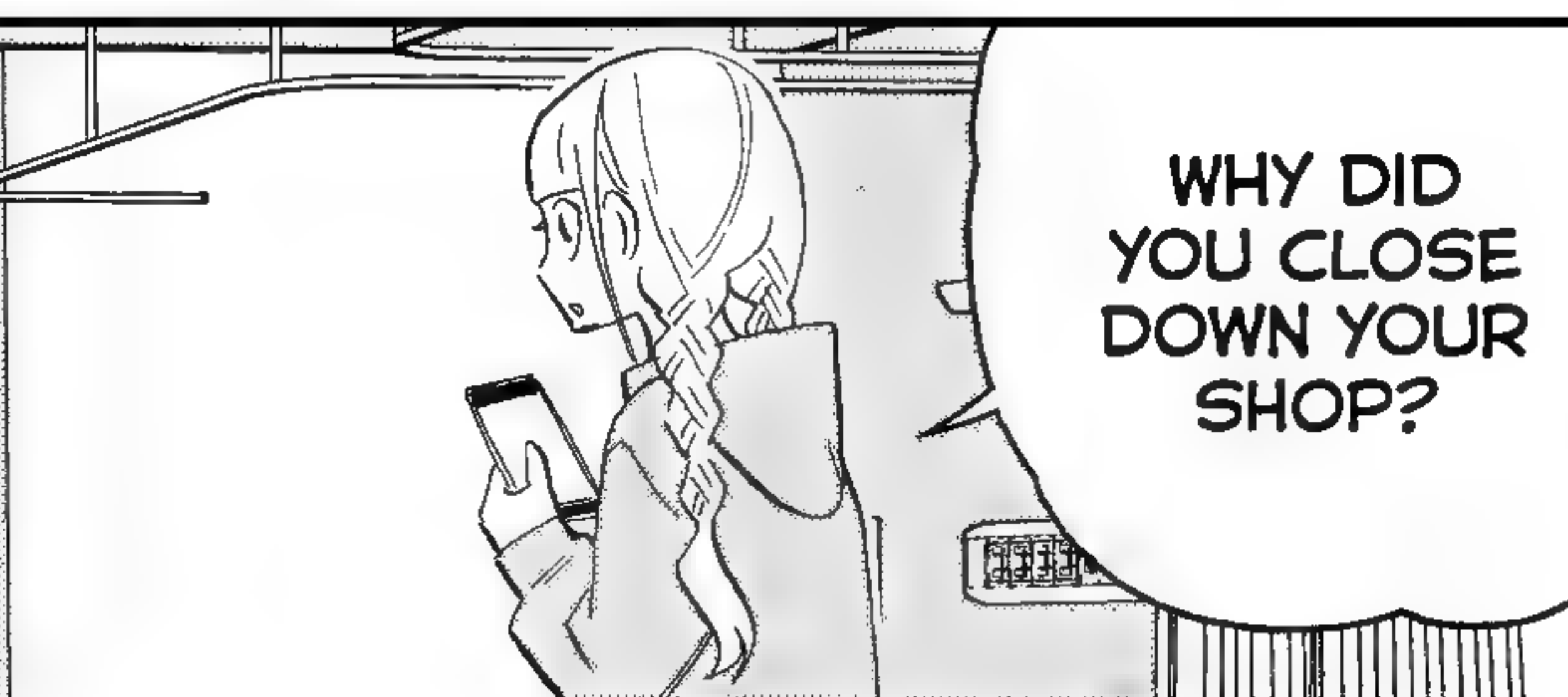
...SHE  
HAD SUCH  
A BRILLIANT  
SMILE.



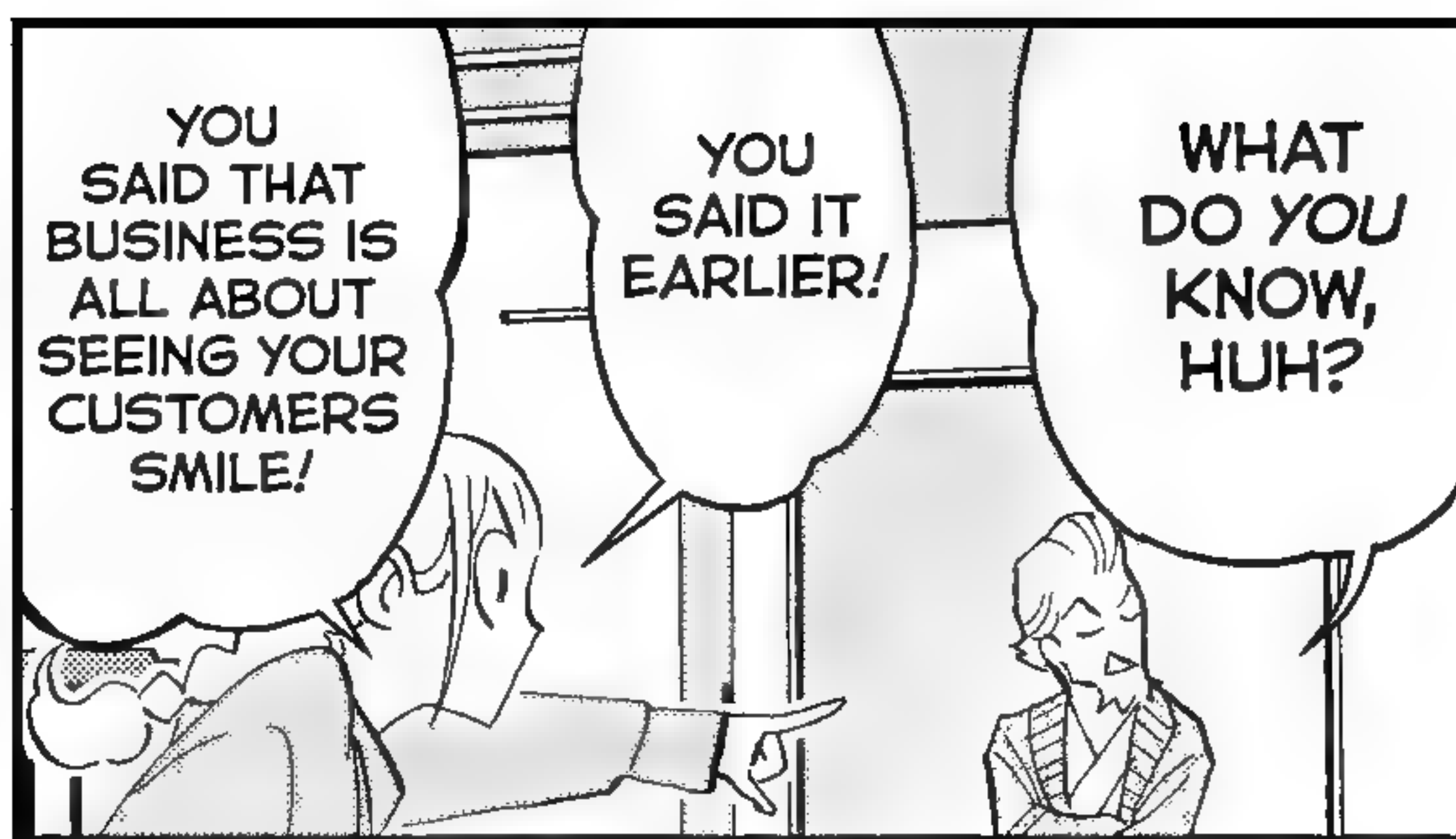
YOUR  
WIFE...



HUH?



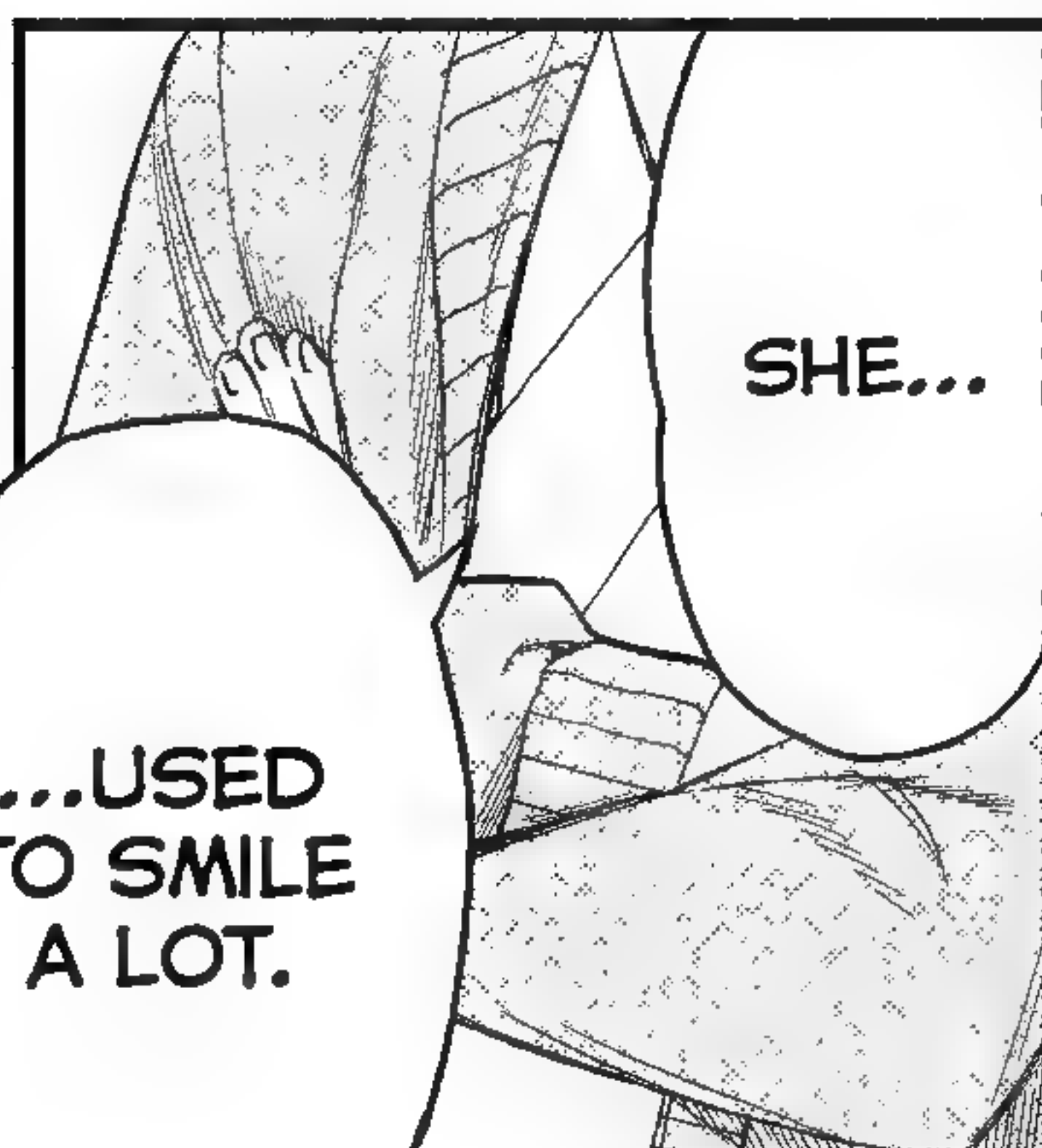
WHY DID  
YOU CLOSE  
DOWN YOUR  
SHOP?



YOU  
SAID THAT  
BUSINESS IS  
ALL ABOUT  
SEEING YOUR  
CUSTOMERS  
SMILE!

YOU  
SAID IT  
EARLIER!

WHAT  
DO YOU  
KNOW,  
HUH?



...USED  
TO SMILE  
A LOT.

SHE...



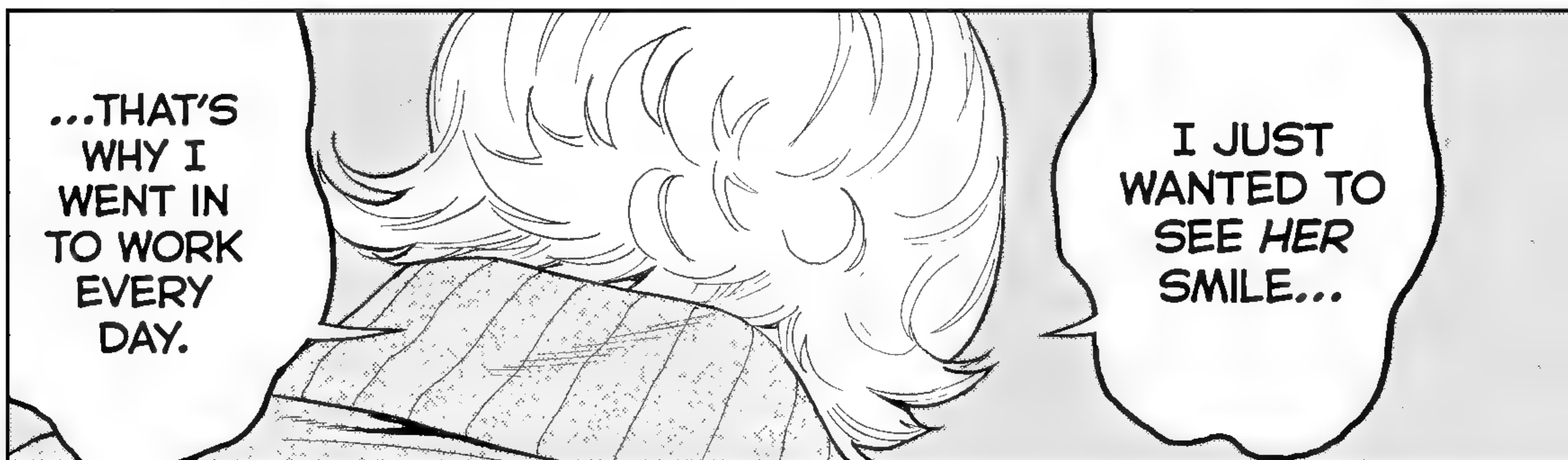
TSK...



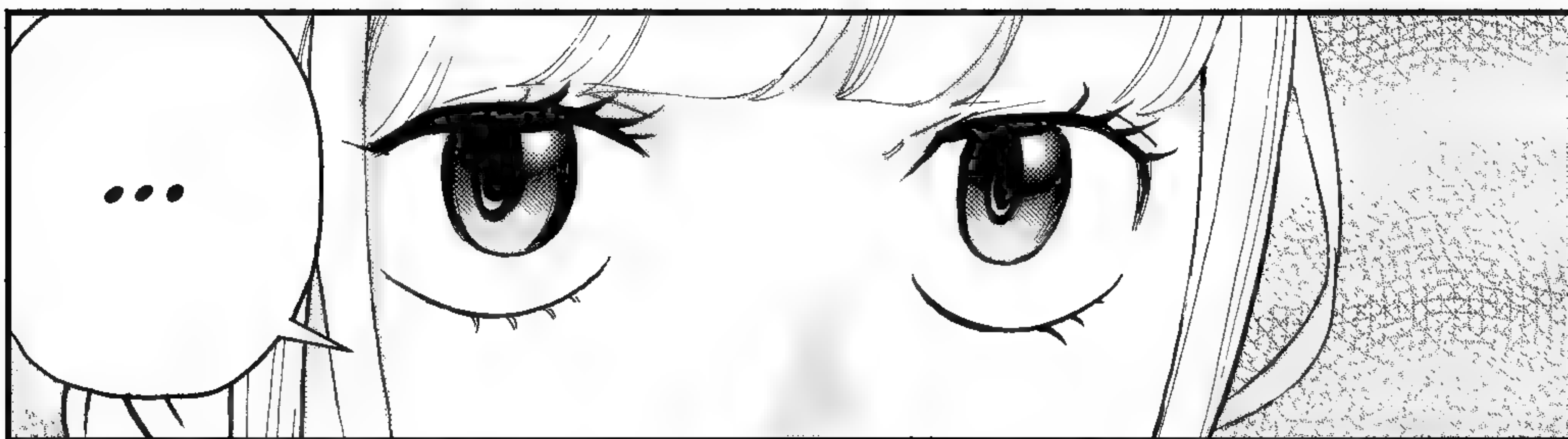
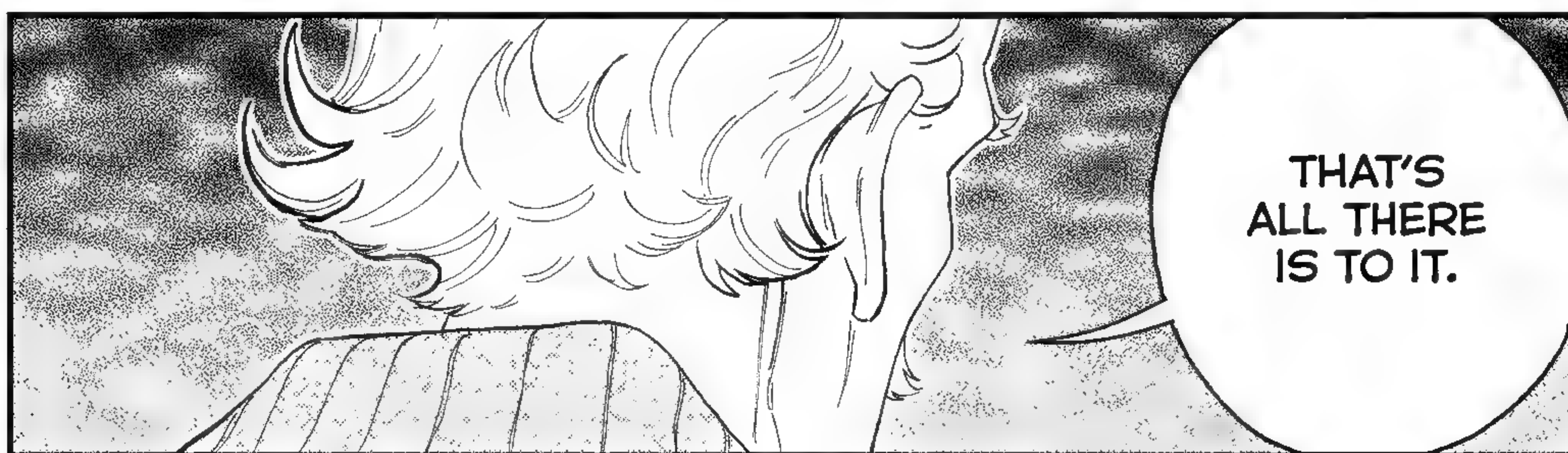
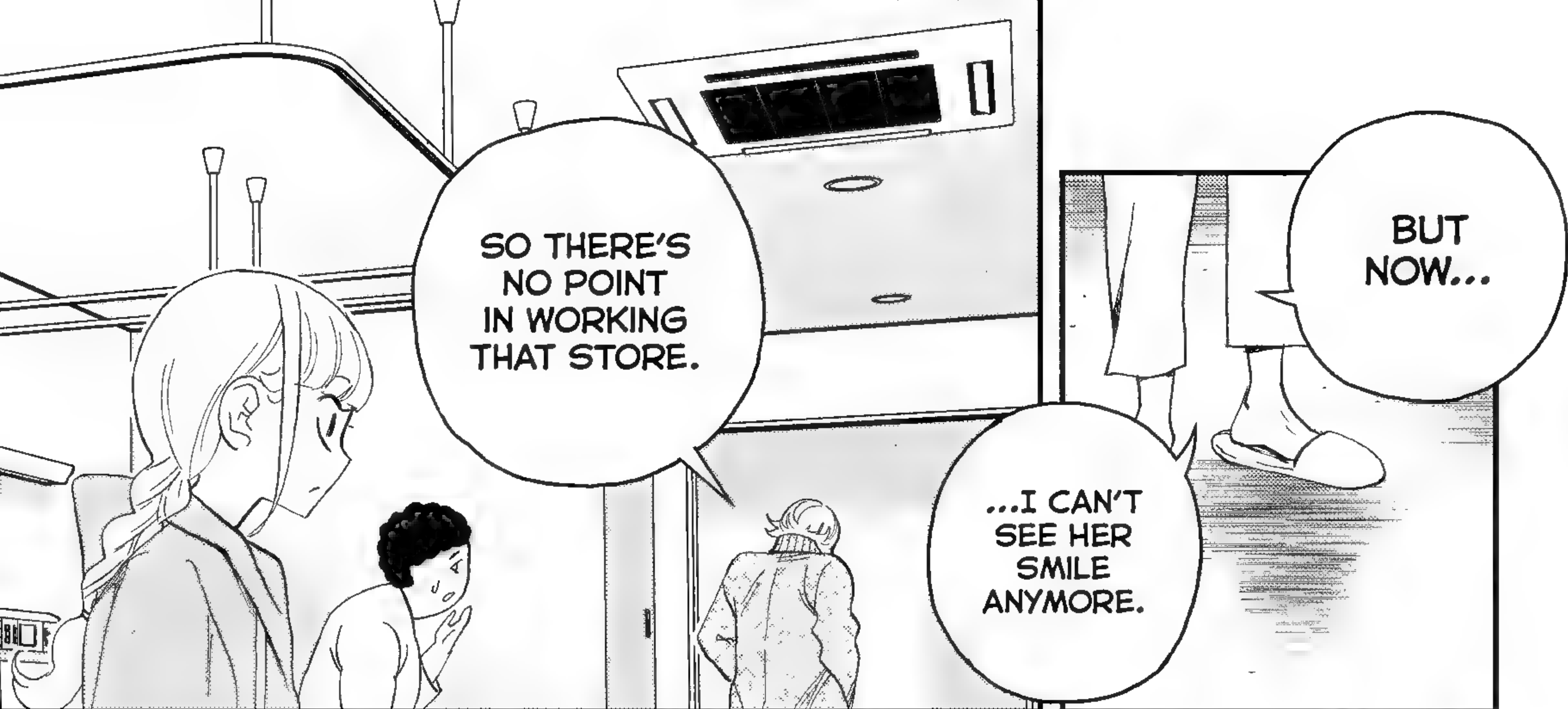
WEREN'T  
YOU MAKING  
JAPANESE  
SNACKS  
WITH YOUR  
CLIENTS IN  
MIND?

I BECAME  
A SINGER  
BECAUSE I  
WANT EVERY-  
ONE IN THE  
WORLD TO  
HEAR MY  
VOICE.











...WOULD  
YOU BE  
THE FIRST  
PERSON  
TO LISTEN  
TO IT?!

IF I  
FINISH  
IT...

I DON'T  
WANNA WASTE  
MY TIME  
LISTENING  
TO SHITTY  
SONGS.

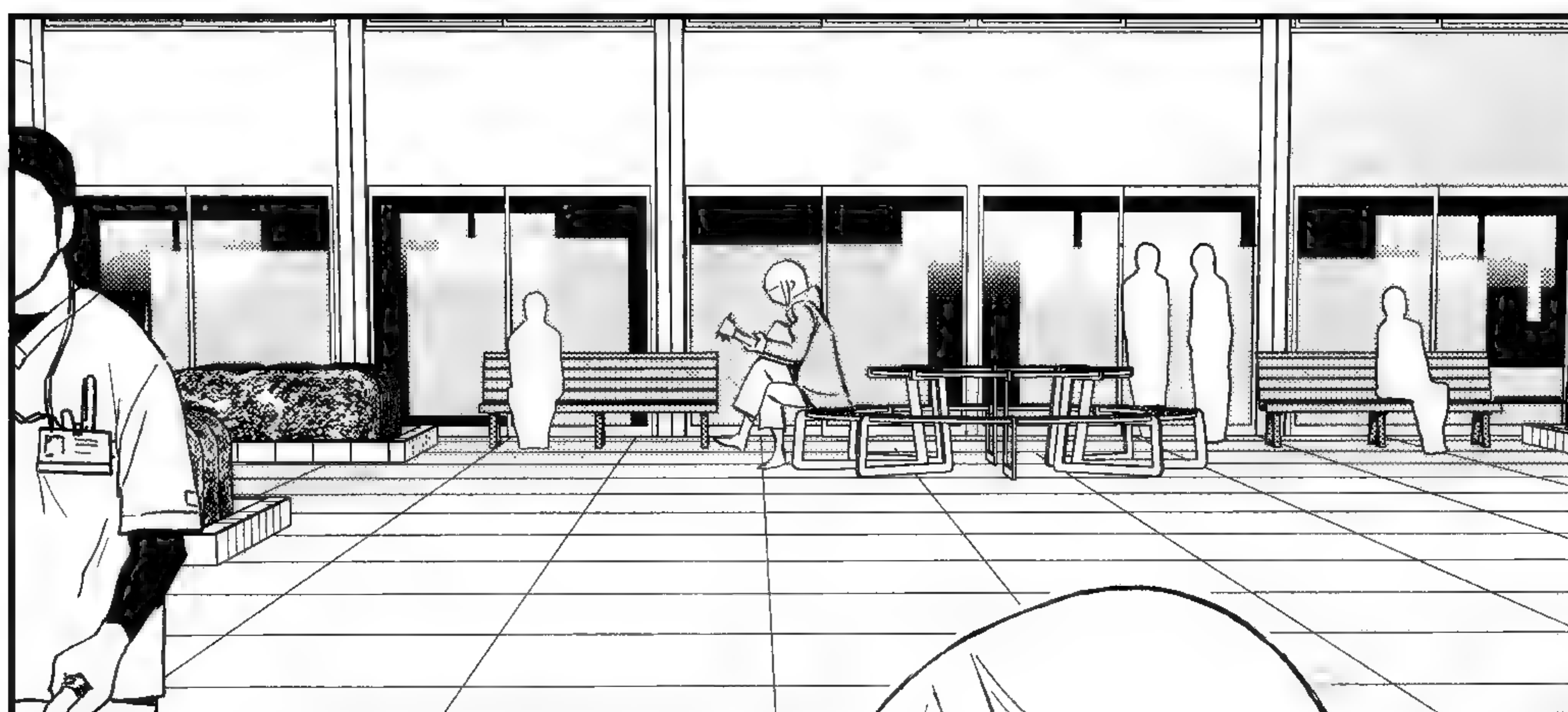
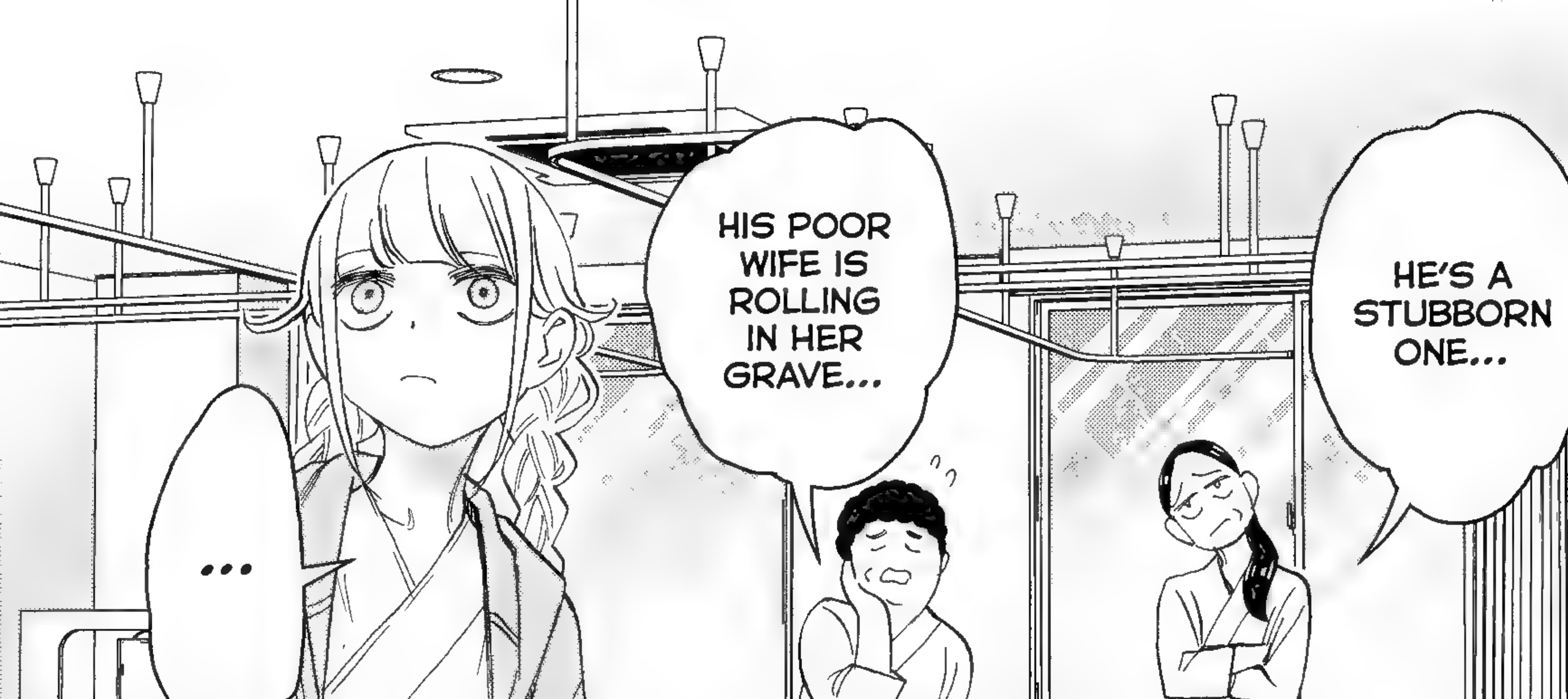
I'M OUTTA  
CHICKEN,  
TOO.

NO WAY!

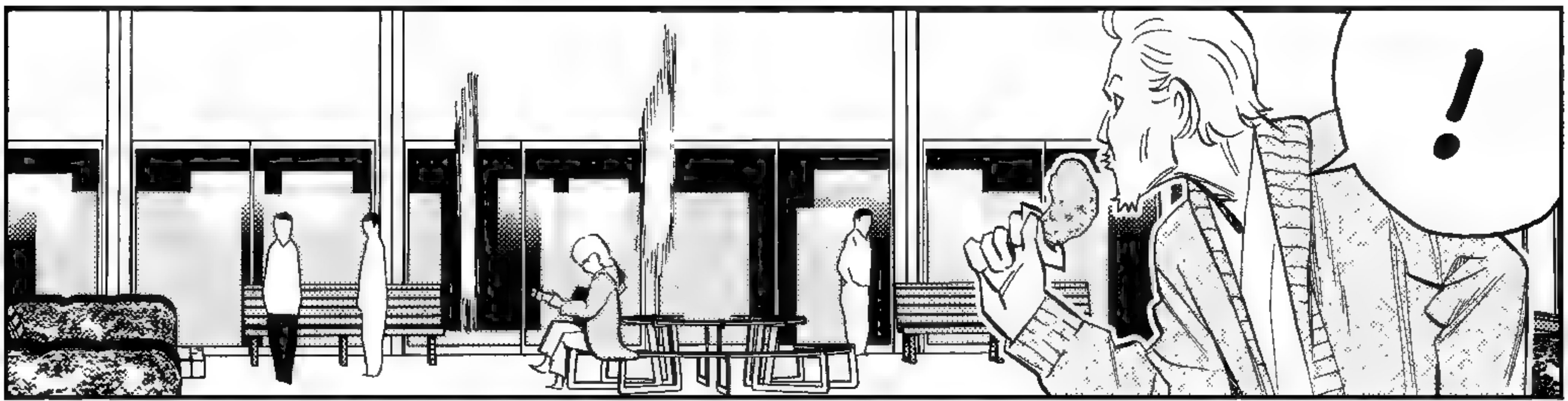
BLEEEH!

YOU  
HAVE TO!  
YOU'LL  
BE THE  
FIRST,  
OKAY?!





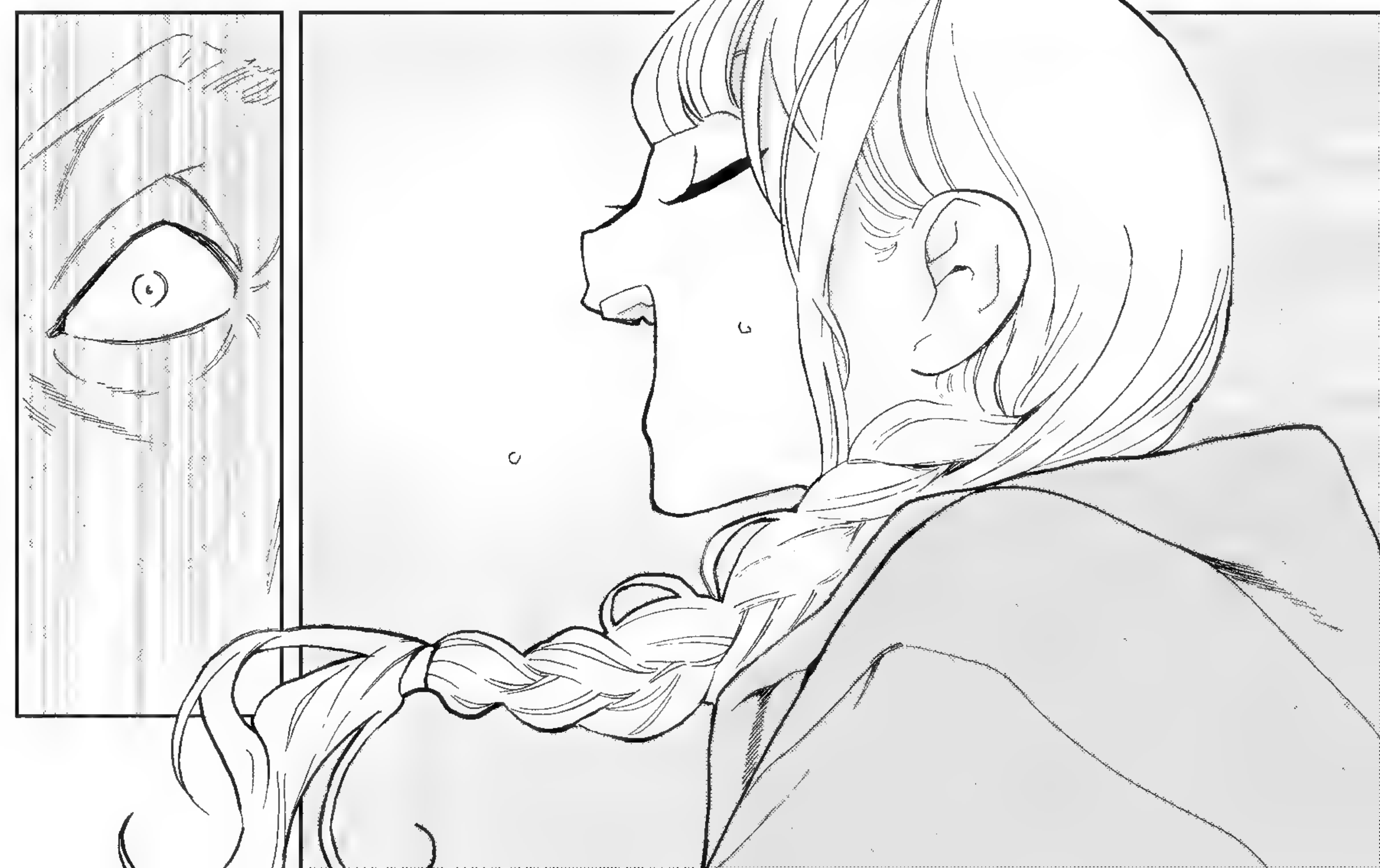
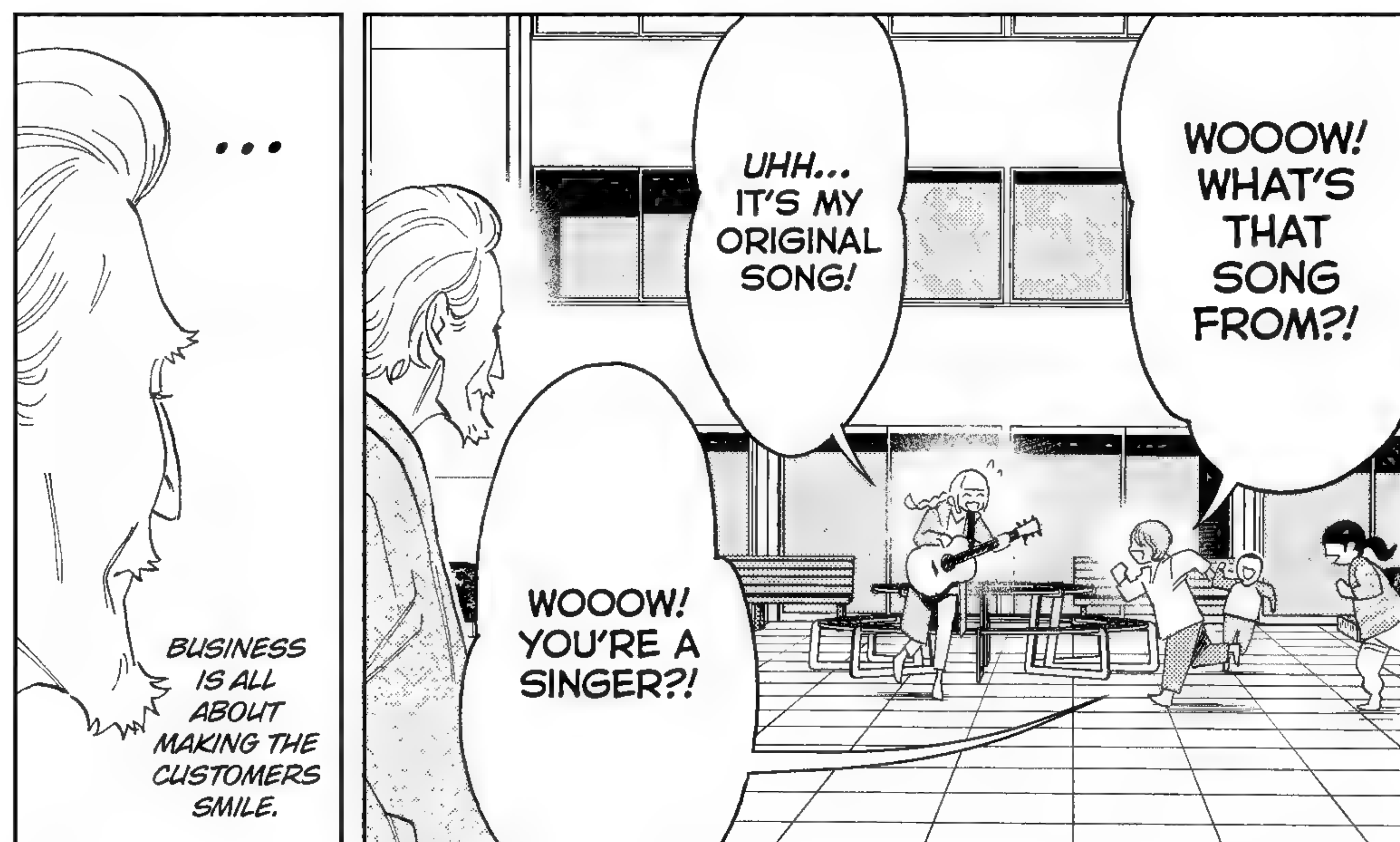




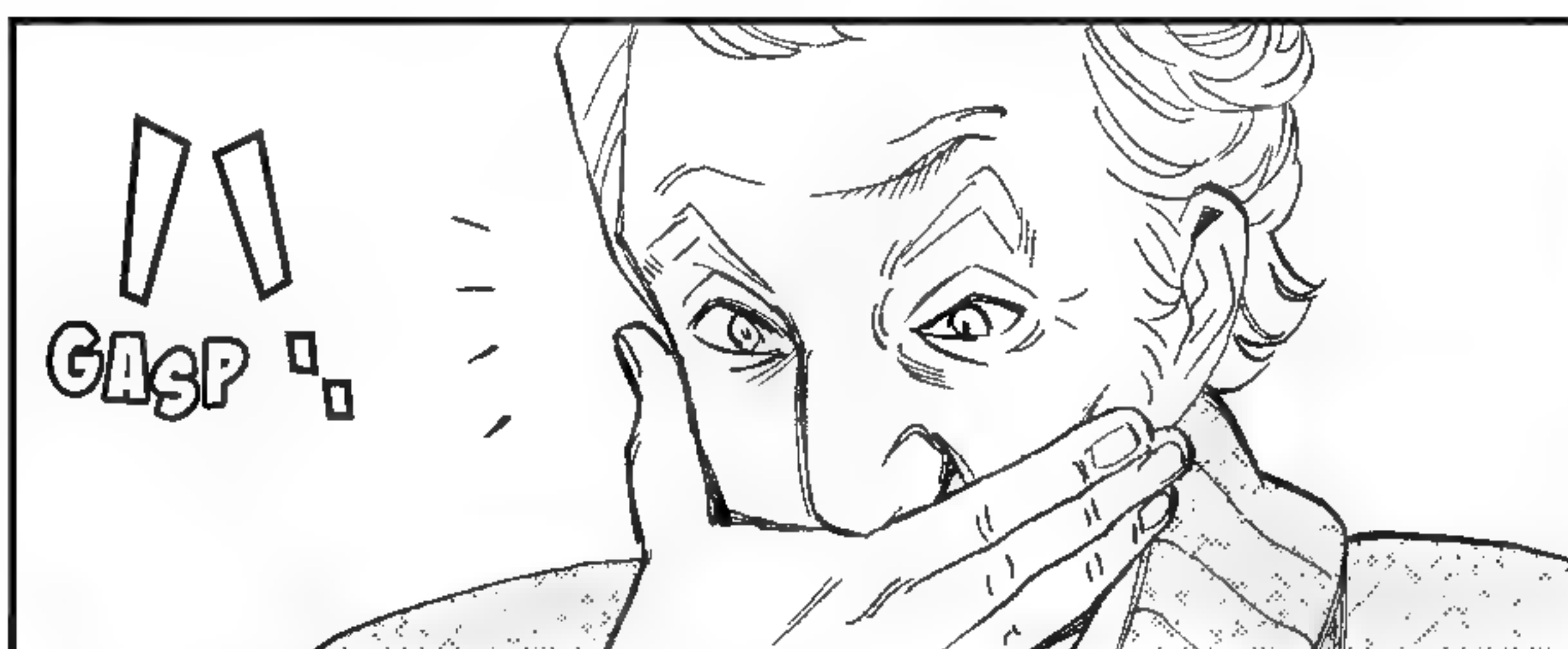
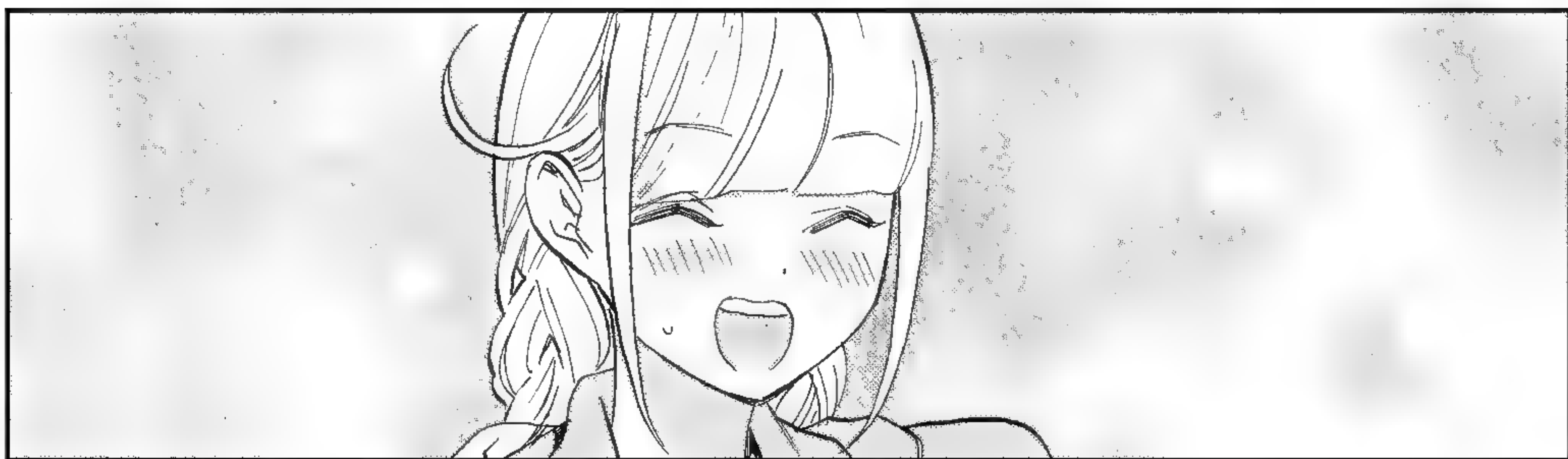




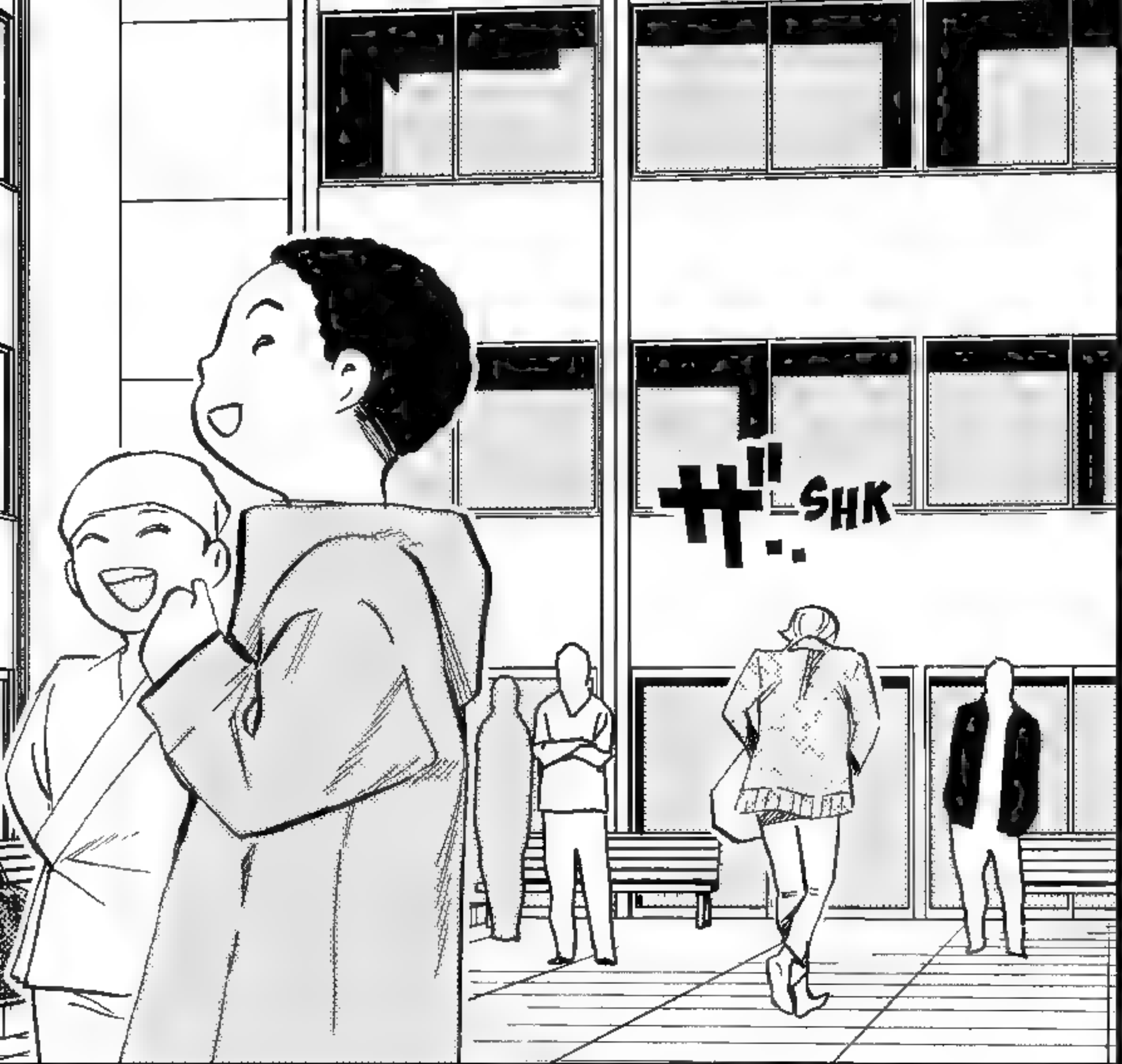




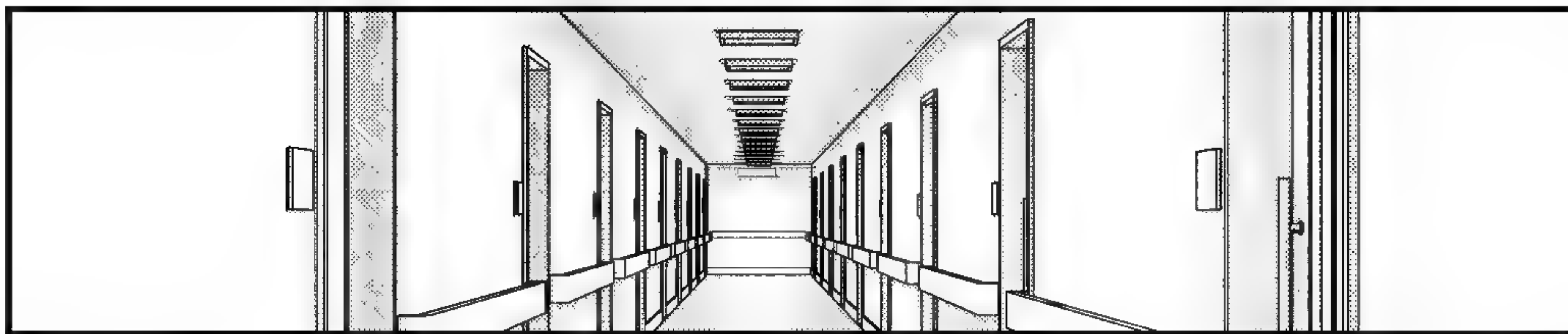
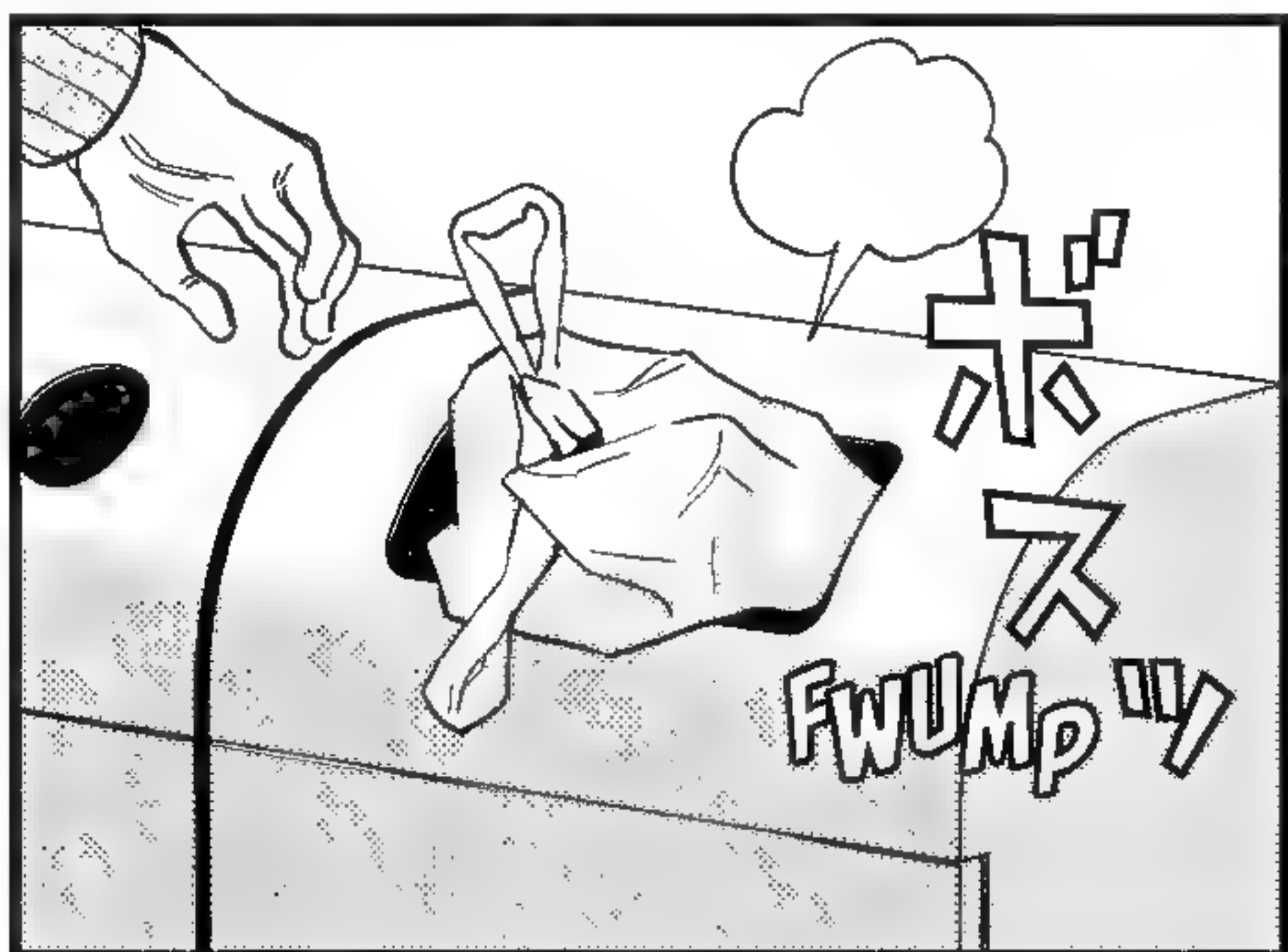
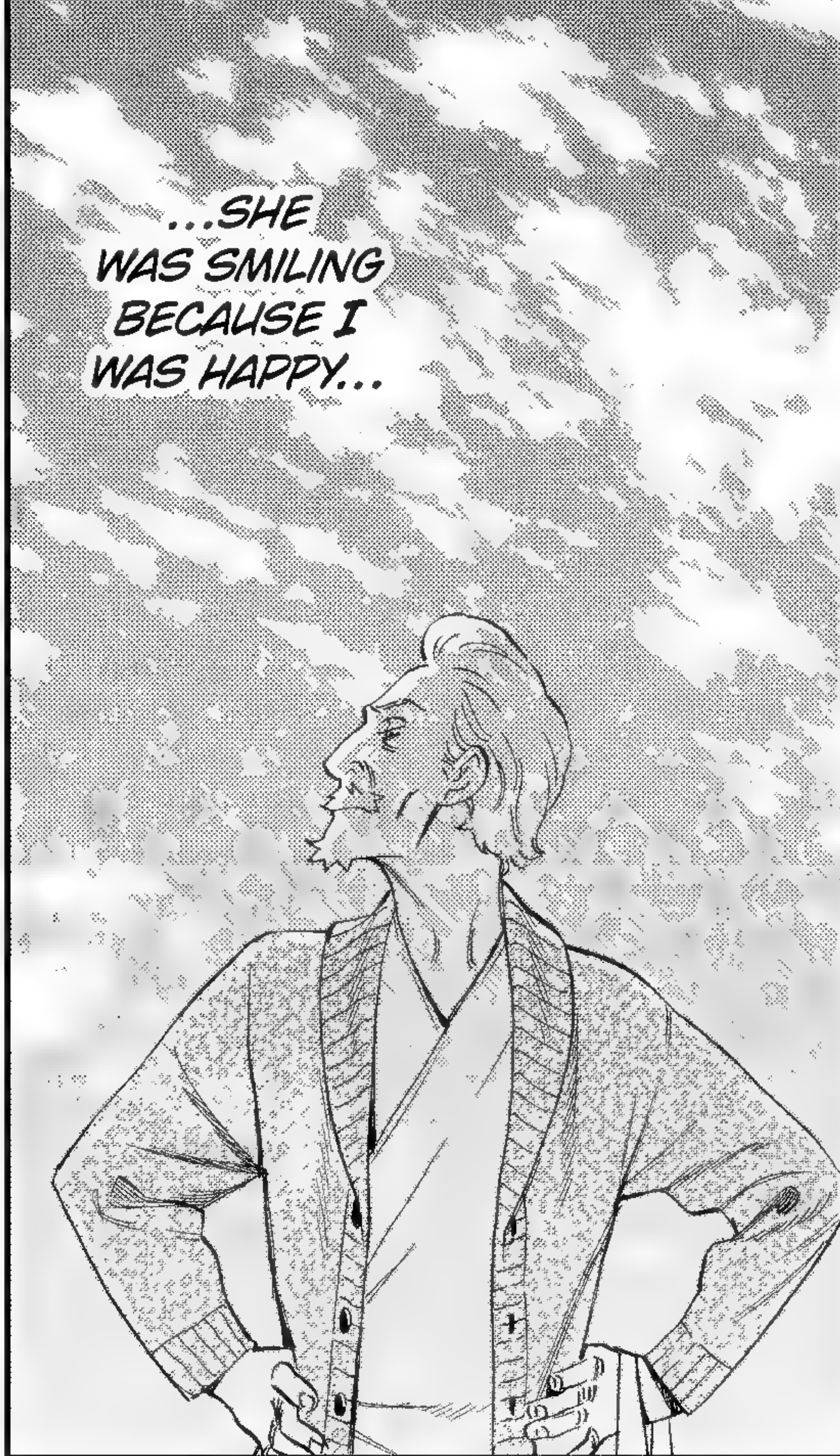








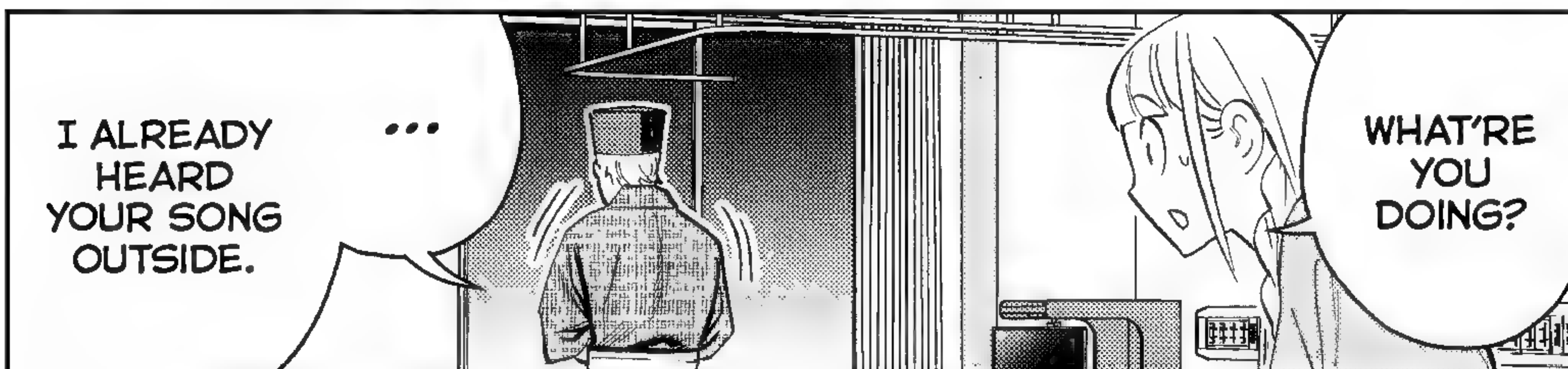
...SHE  
WAS SMILING  
BECAUSE I  
WAS HAPPY...



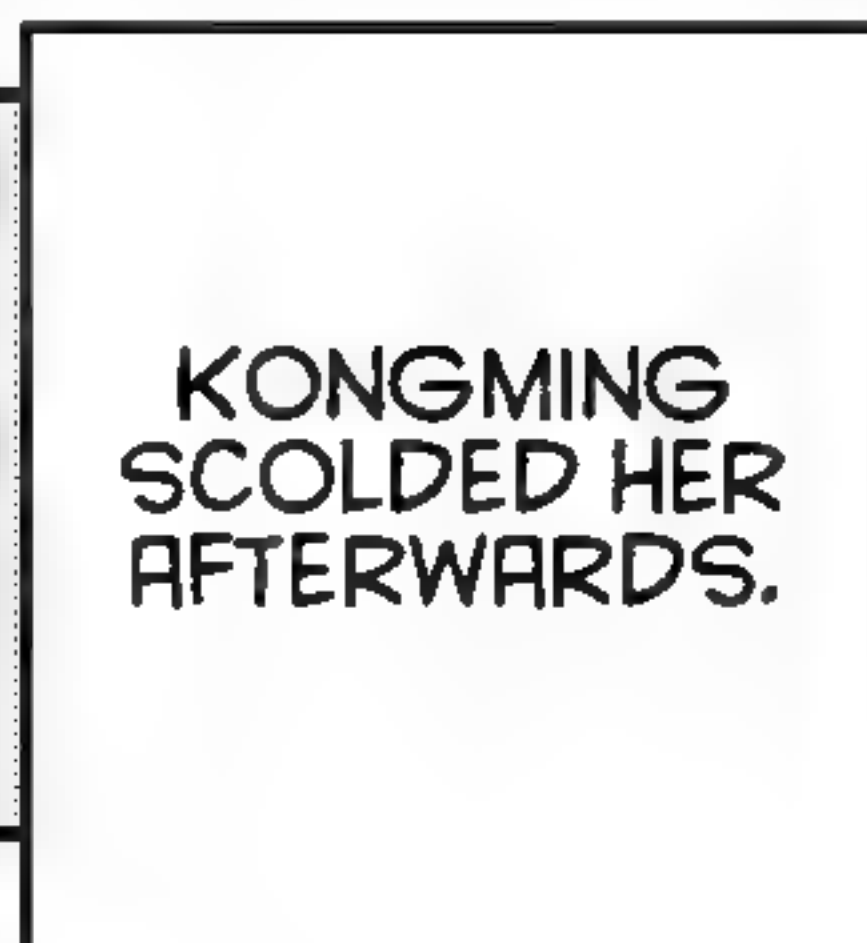
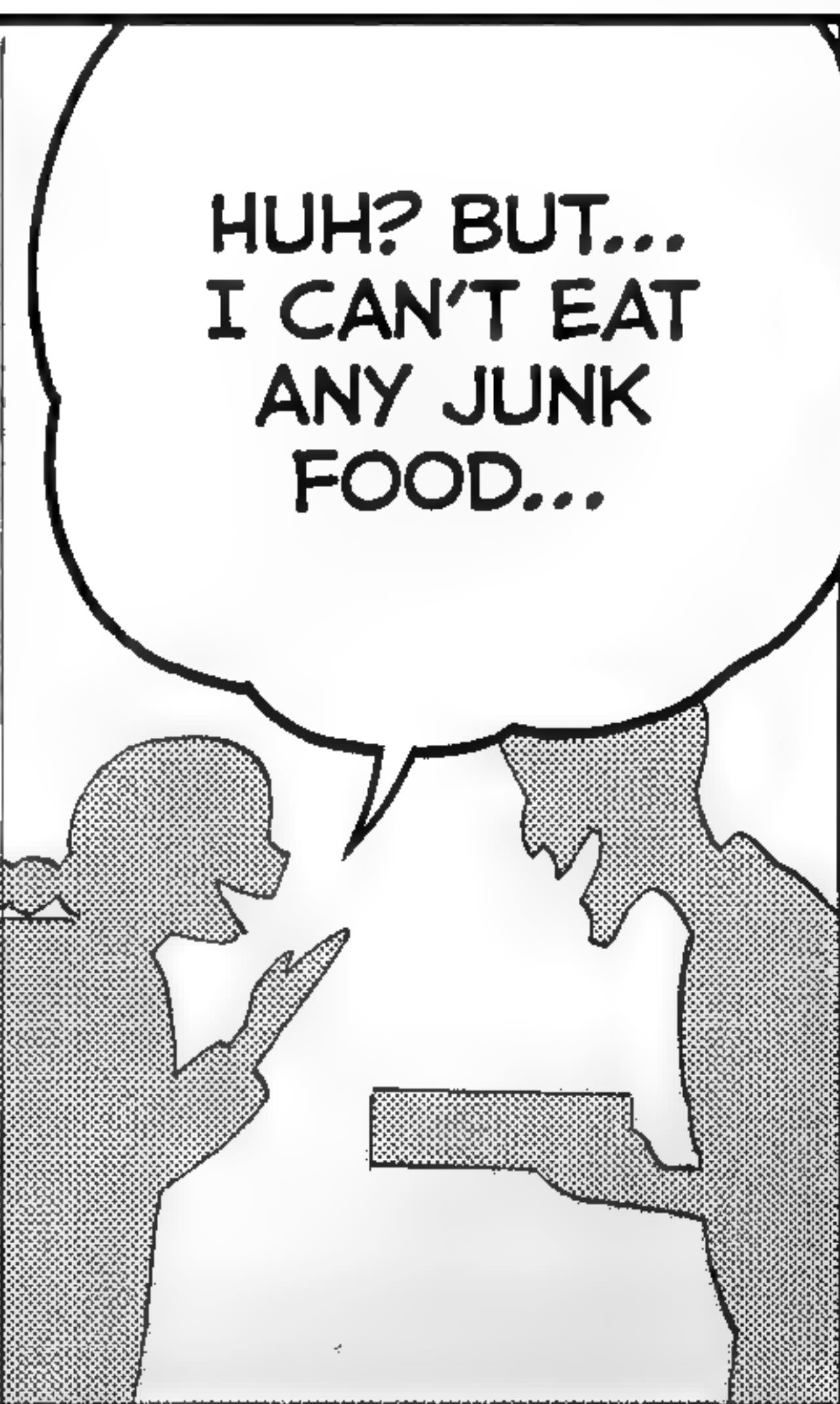
NOTO-  
SAAAN?







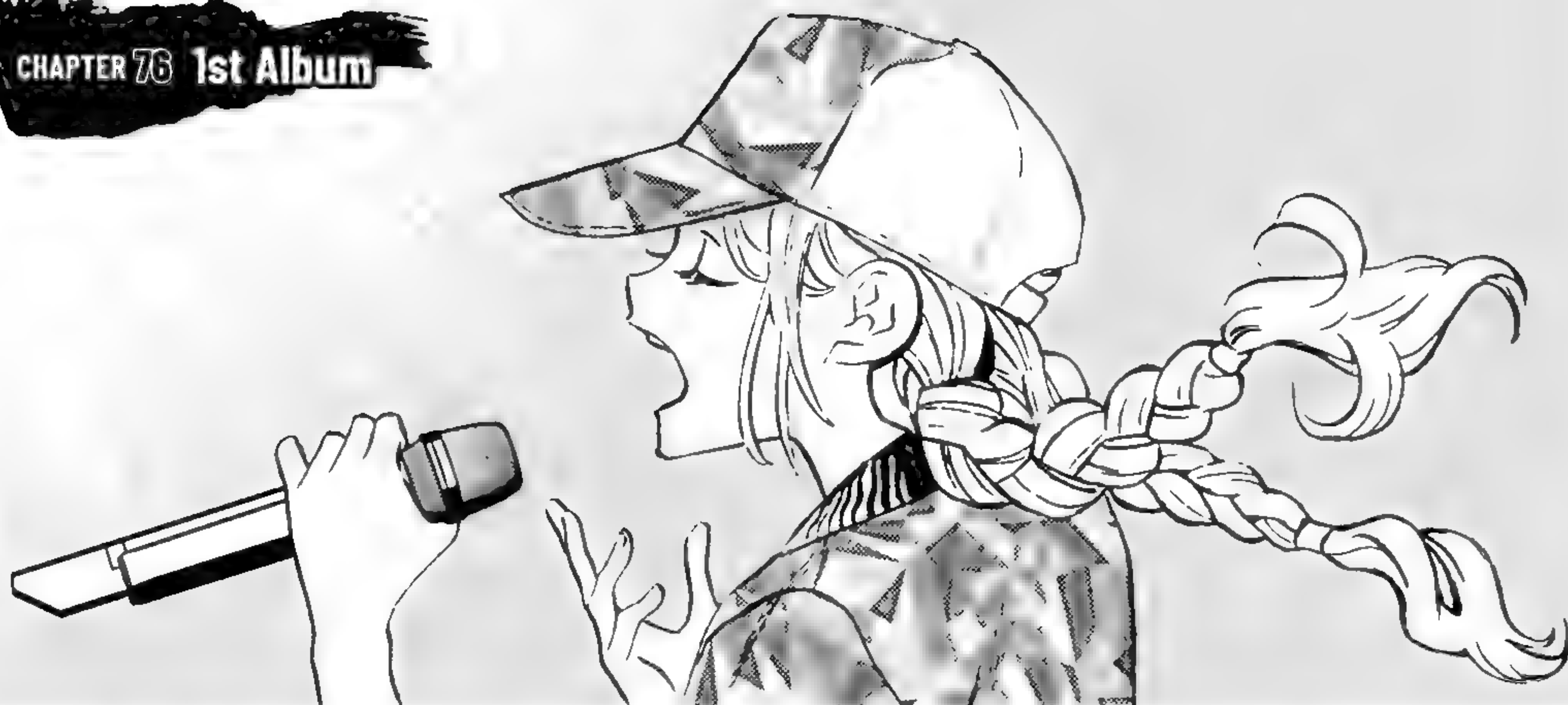






1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!





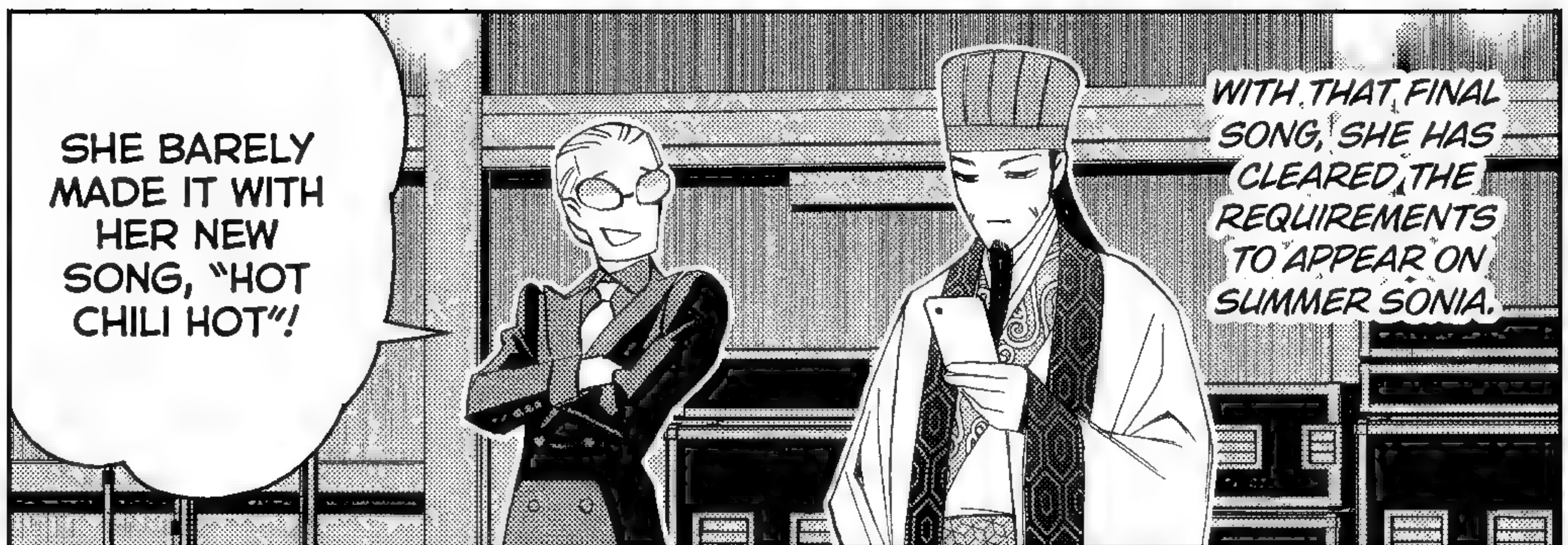




"DREAMER,"  
"FLOWER  
CROWN,"  
"STAR TRIP,"  
"SUGAR"...

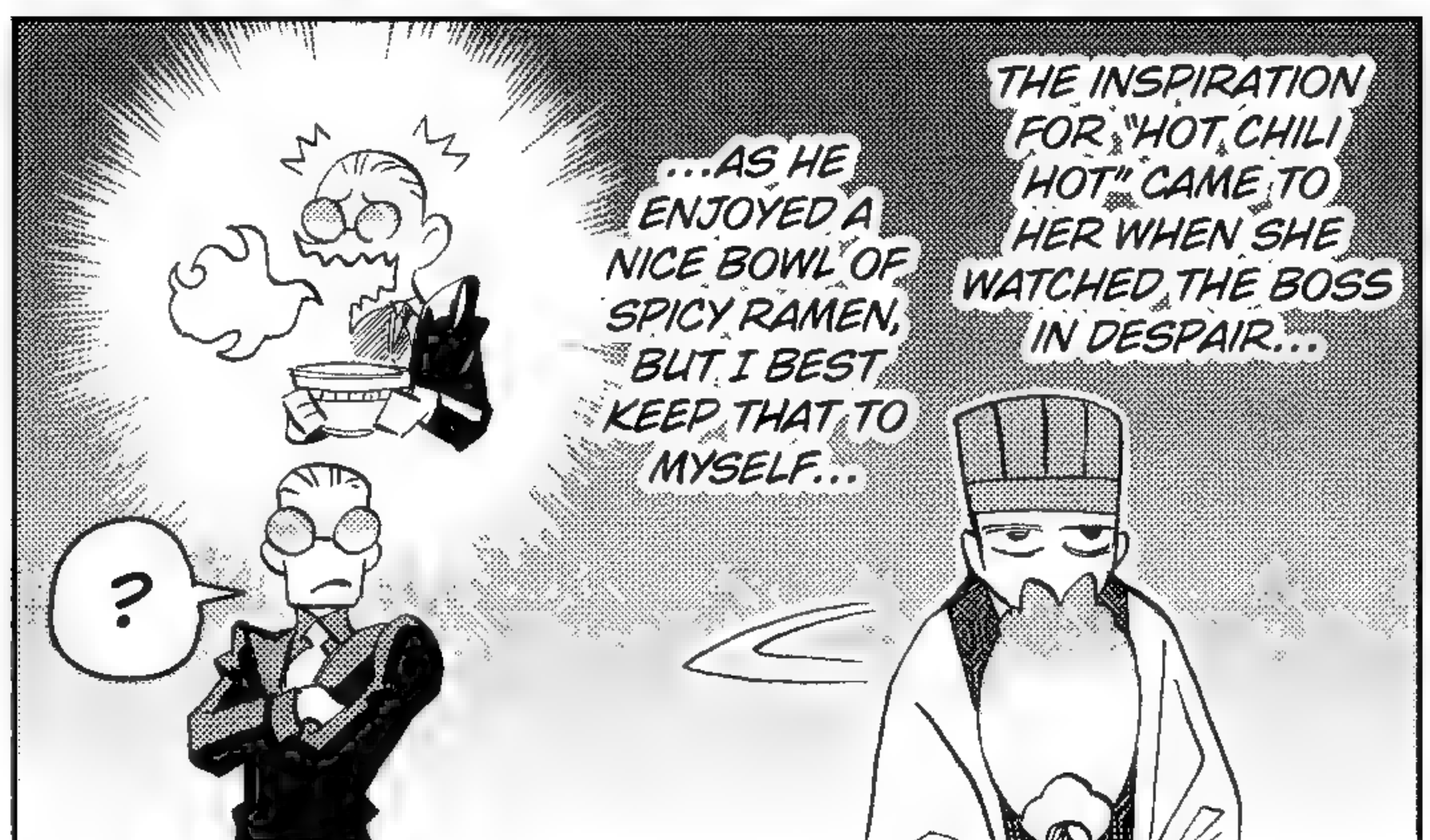
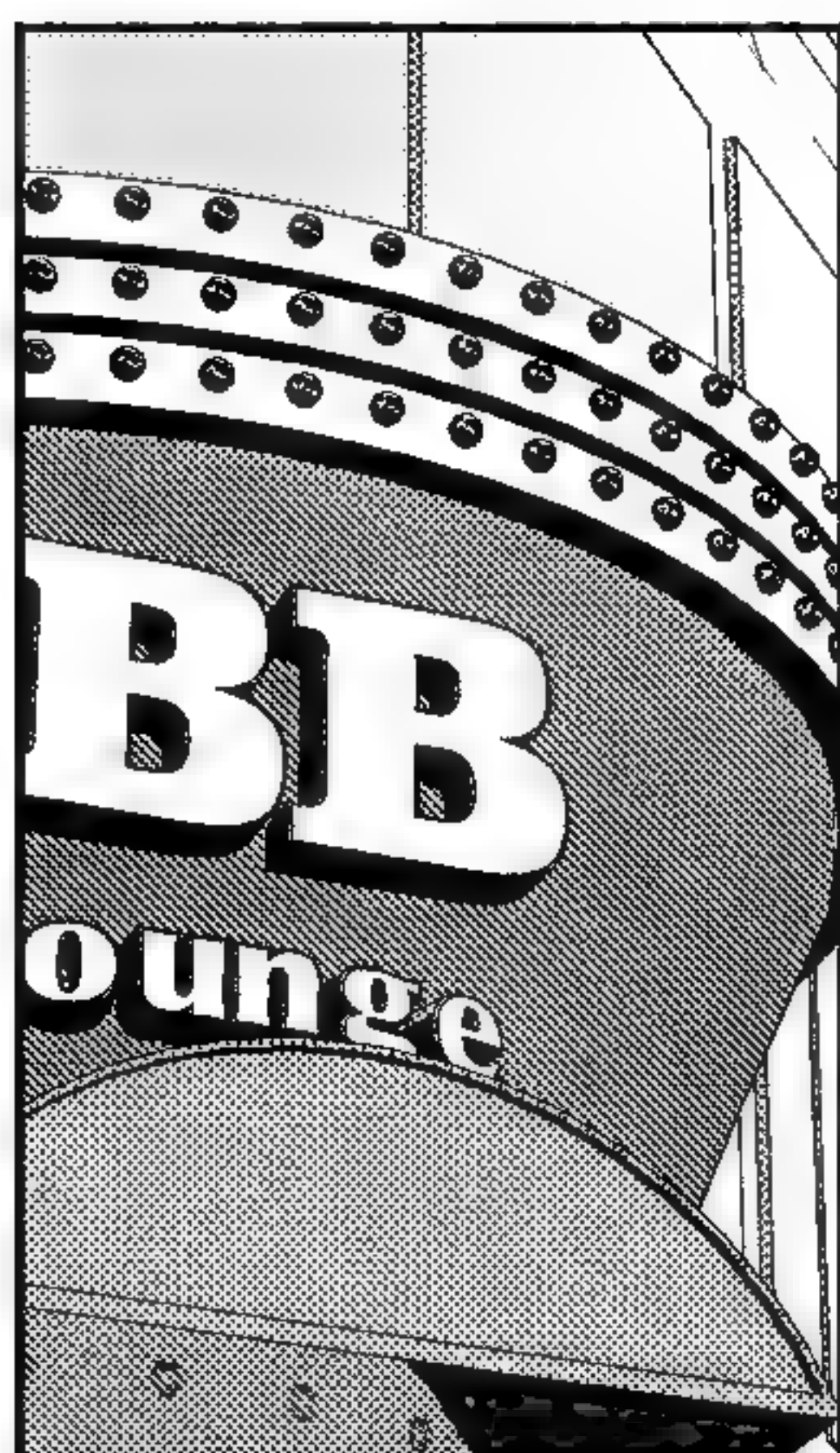
LADY  
EIKO'S  
ORIGINAL  
SONGS...

AND "HOT  
CHILI HOT,"  
WHICH SHE  
COMPLETED  
TWO WEEKS  
AGO...



SHE BARELY  
MADE IT WITH  
HER NEW  
SONG, "HOT  
CHILI HOT"!

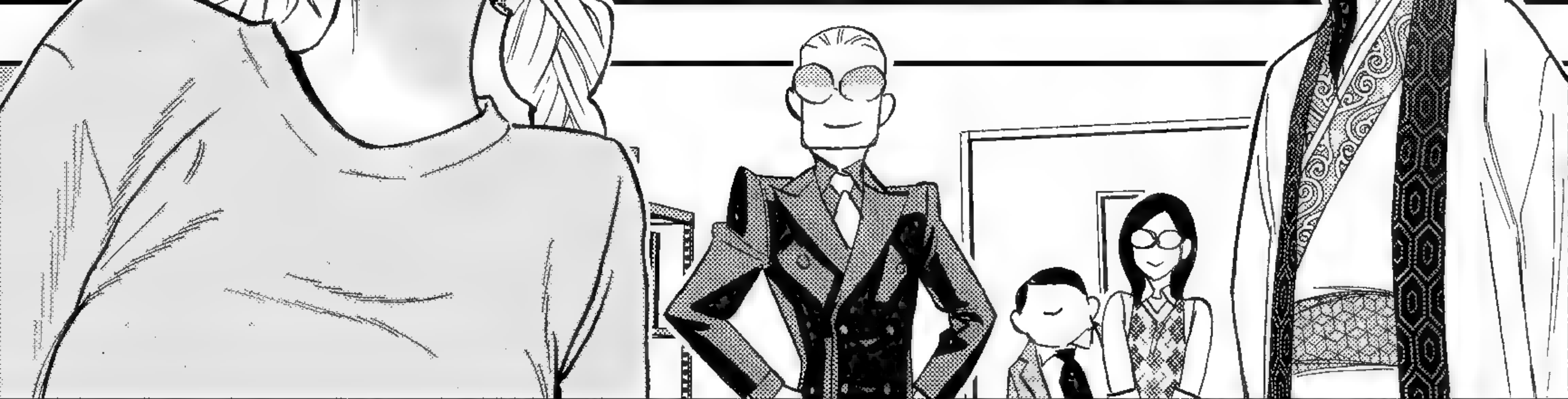
WITH THAT FINAL  
SONG, SHE HAS  
CLEARED THE  
REQUIREMENTS  
TO APPEAR ON  
SUMMER SONIA.



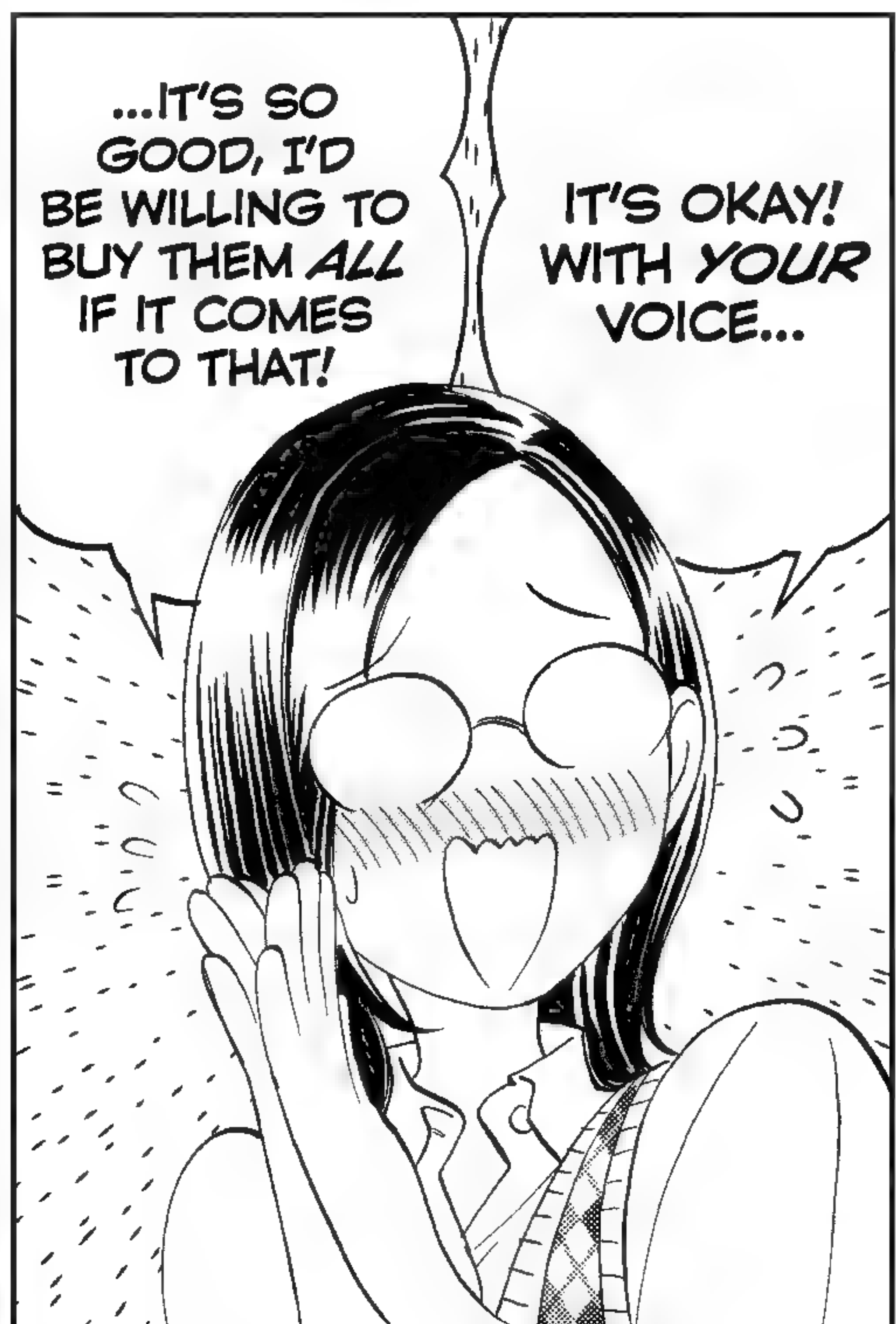
...AS HE  
ENJOYED A  
NICE BOWL OF  
SPICY RAMEN,  
BUT I BEST  
KEEP THAT TO  
MYSELF...

THE INSPIRATION  
FOR "HOT CHILI  
HOT" CAME TO  
HER WHEN SHE  
WATCHED THE BOSS  
IN DESPAIR...



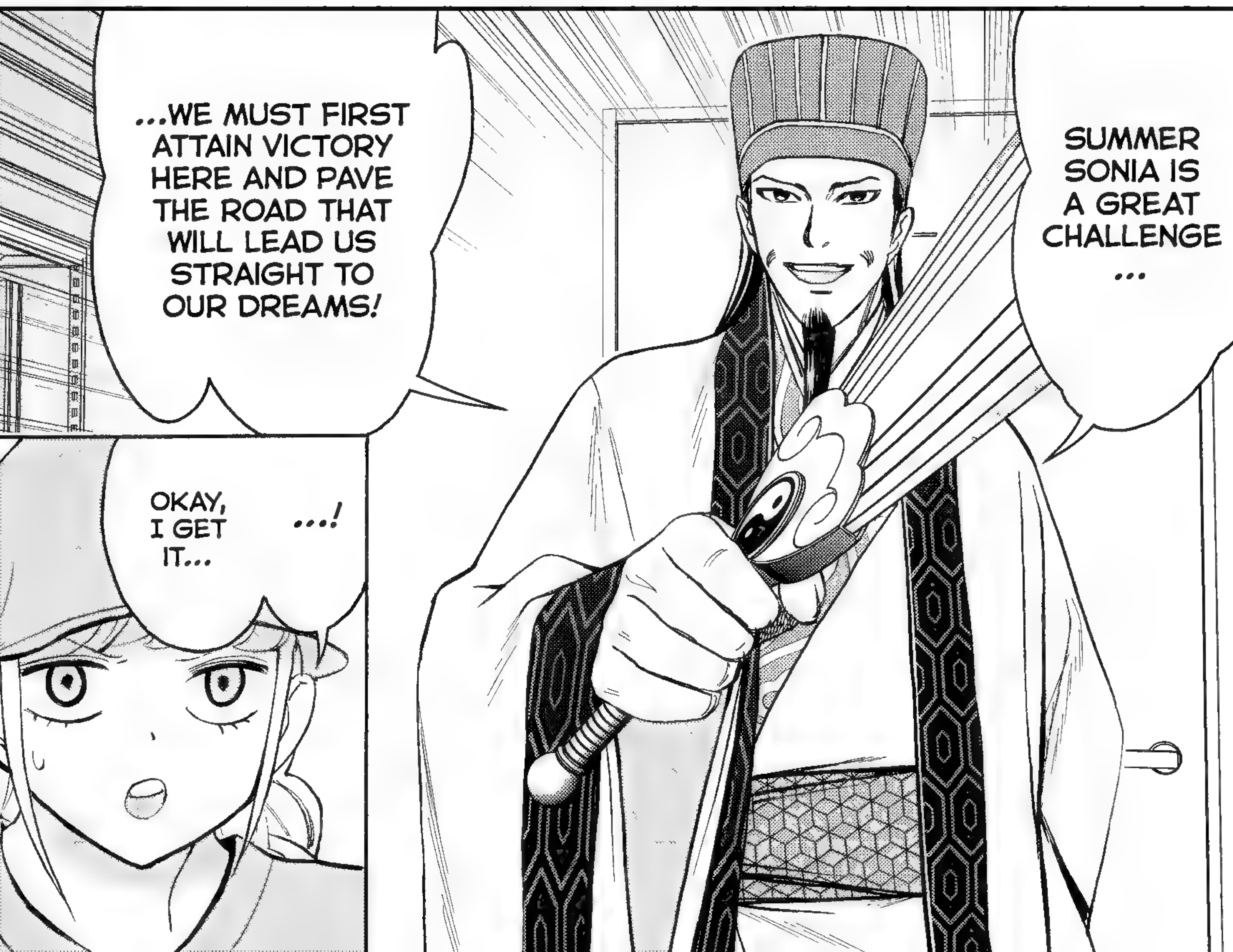
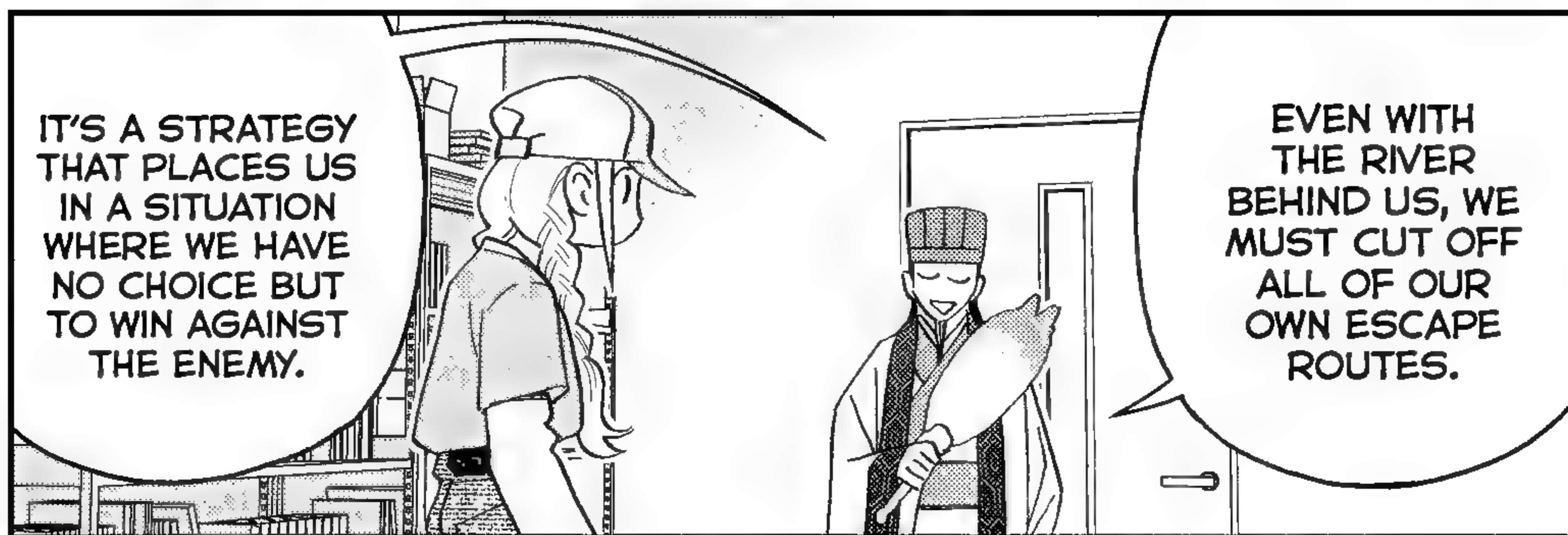




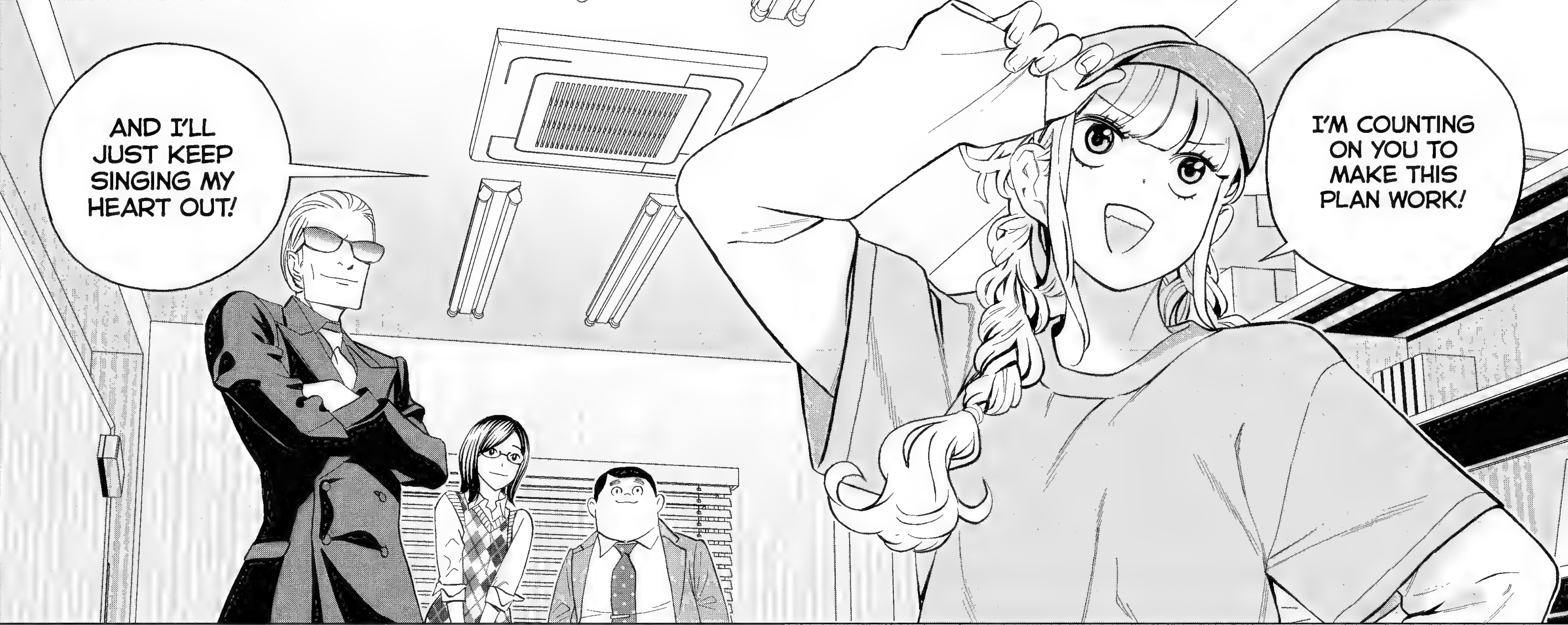




背水一戰 AN IDIOM THAT ORIGINATED FROM THE BATTLE OF JINGXING, REFERRING TO BEING CORNERED IN A LAST STAND. WHEN THE ZHAO ARMY CHASED A PORTION OF THE HAN ARMY TO THE RIVERSIDE, THE ZHAO ARMY SENT MORE AND MORE TROOPS TO DEFEAT THE HAN, WHICH LEFT THE ZHAO CAMP VULNERABLE. SEEING THIS, THE HAN ARMY THEN SENT ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO TAKE OVER THE ZHAO CAMP, WHILE THE REMAINING SOLDIERS WERE FORCED TO TAKE A LAST STAND WITH THEIR BACKS AGAINST THE RIVER. THIS MOTIVATED THEM ENOUGH TO FEND OFF THE ZHAO ARMY. BUT BY THE TIME THE ZHAO ARMY RETURNED TO CAMP, THEY REALIZED THAT THEY HAVE ALREADY LOST THEIR BASE!

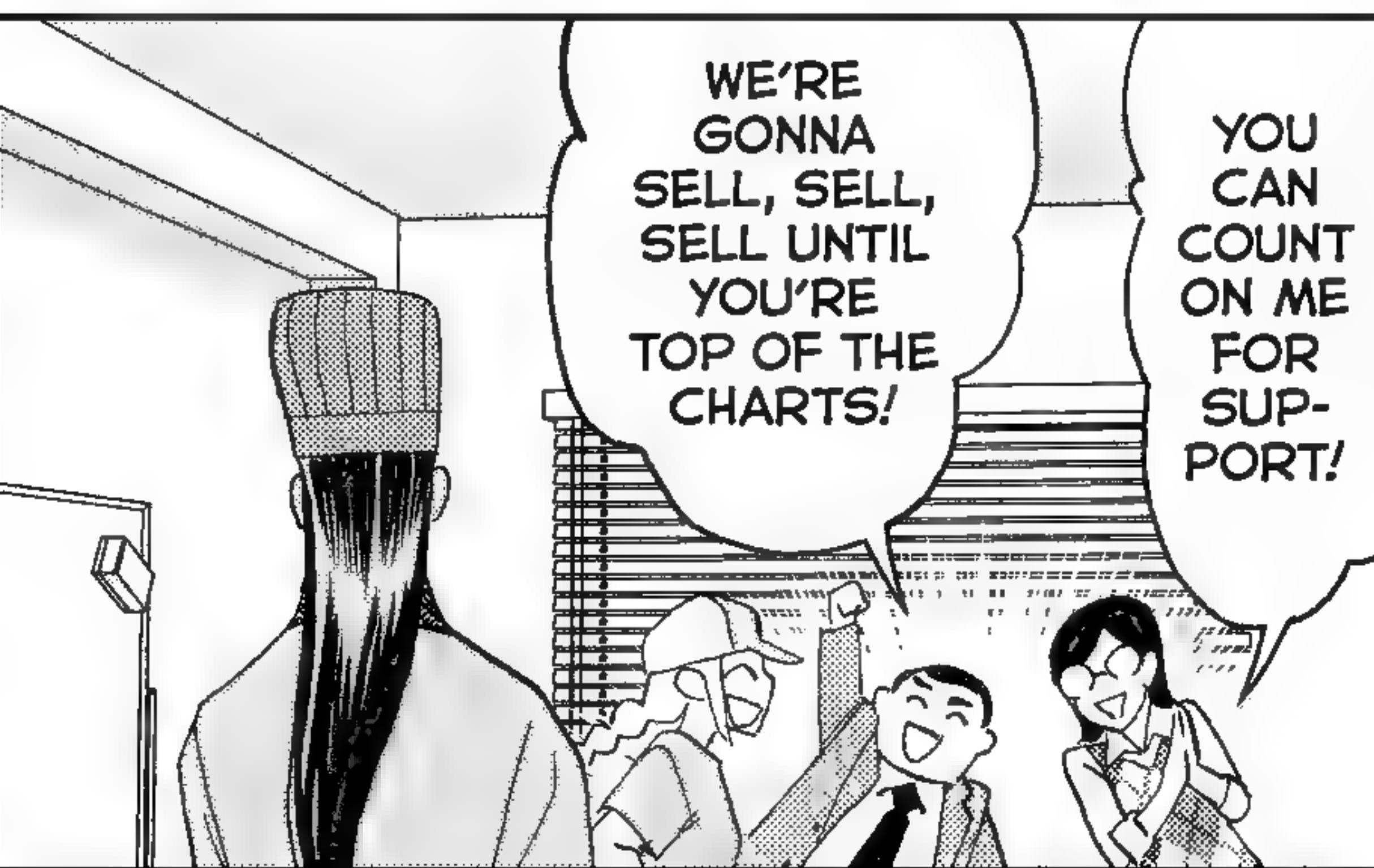






AND I'LL  
JUST KEEP  
SINGING MY  
HEART OUT!

I'M COUNTING  
ON YOU TO  
MAKE THIS  
PLAN WORK!



WE'RE  
GONNA  
SELL, SELL,  
SELL UNTIL  
YOU'RE  
TOP OF THE  
CHARTS!

YOU  
CAN COUNT  
ON ME  
FOR SUP-  
PORT!



REGARDLESS  
OF THE BATTLE...  
THE HEAVENS  
WILL DECIDE THE  
VICTOR...



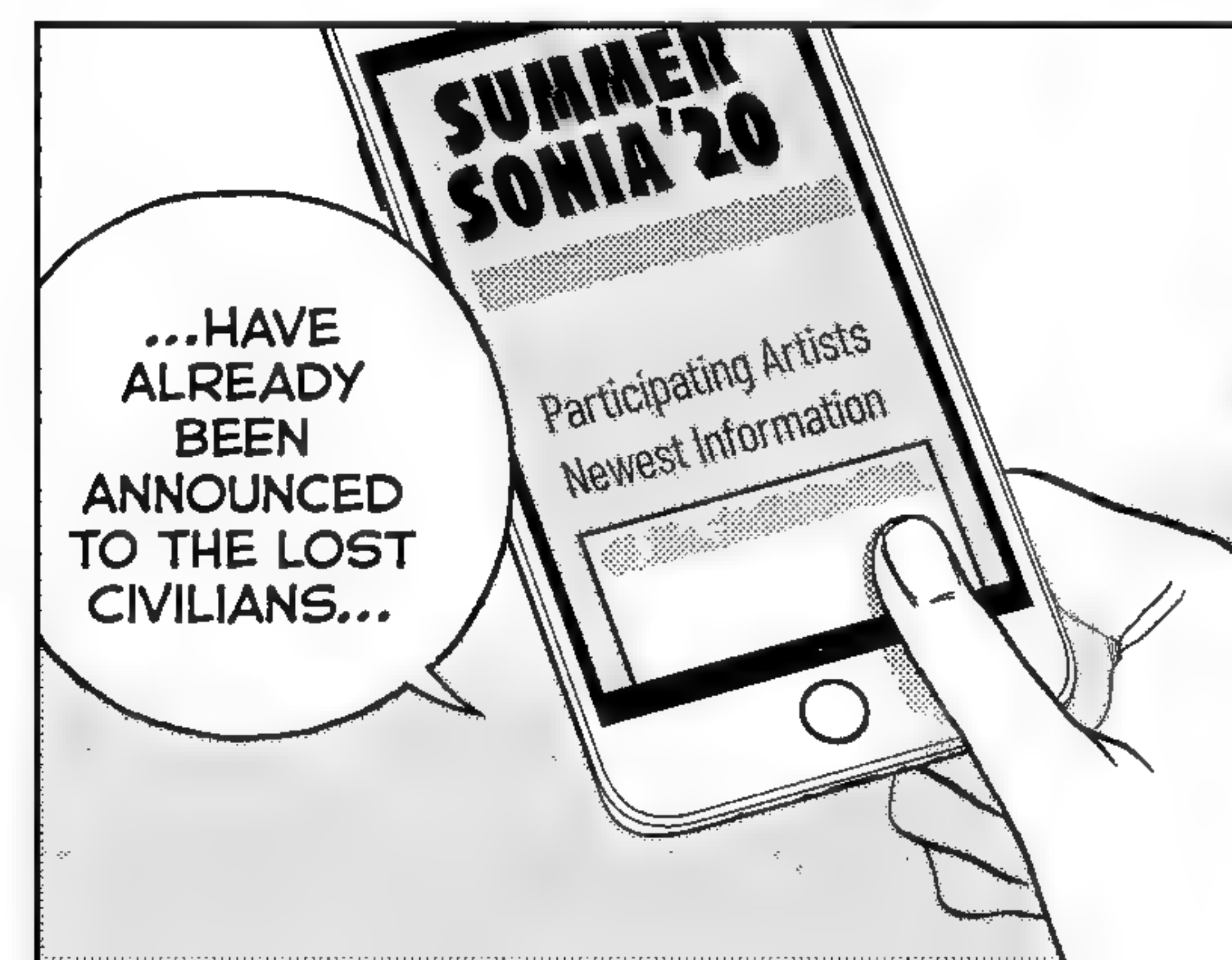
ALL  
RIGHT! I'VE  
GOTTA DO  
MY VERY  
BEST!



YOUR GOAL,  
MARIA DIEZEL,  
WILL SURELY  
BE THERE AS  
WELL.



BUT OF  
COURSE,  
THE CHAL-  
LENGERS  
OF SUMMER  
SONIA...



...HAVE  
ALREADY  
BEEN  
ANNOUNCED  
TO THE LOST  
CIVILIANS...

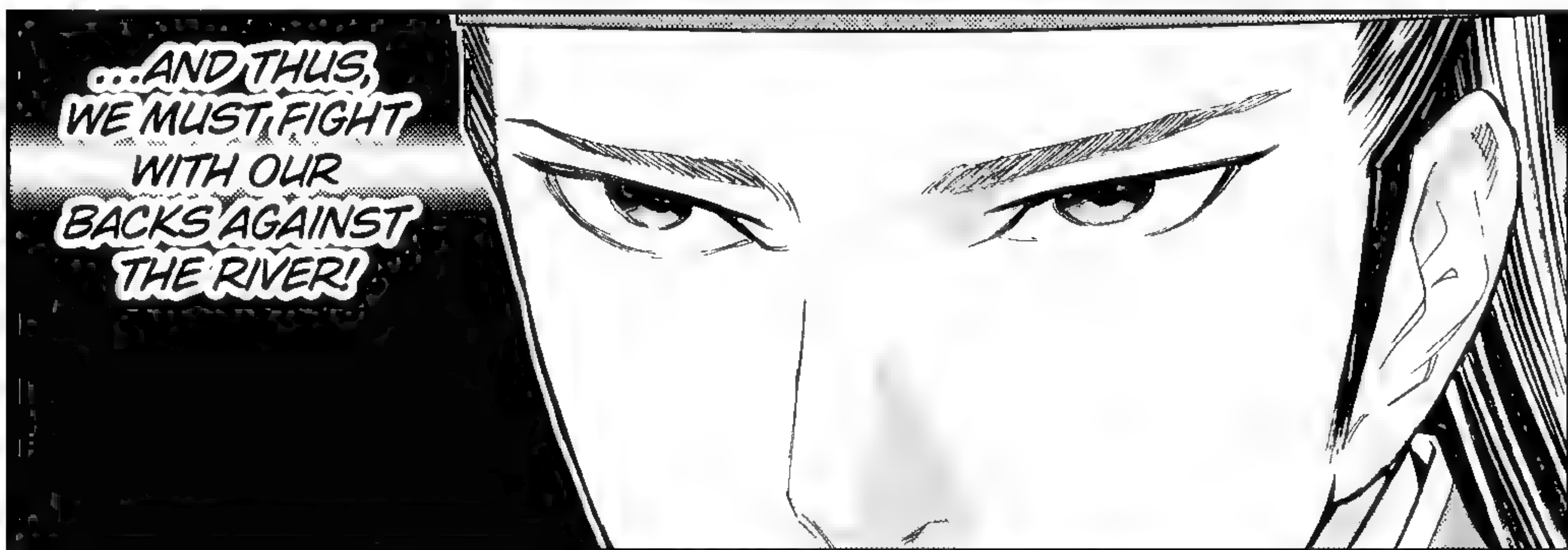


VERY  
WELL.

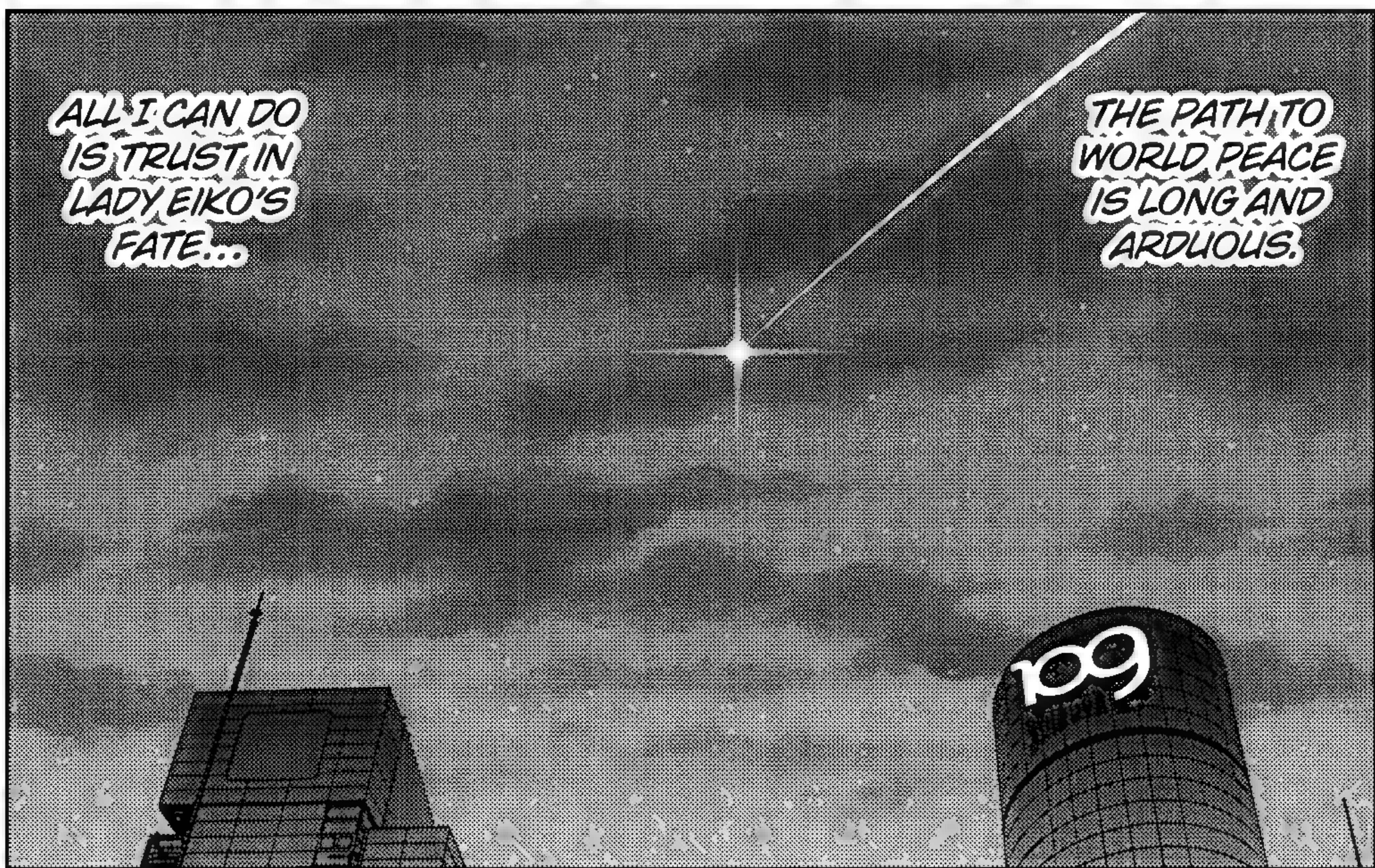




LADY EIKO IS ABOUT TO  
FACE HER MOST DIFFICULT,  
CHALLENGING TRIAL...



...AND THUS,  
WE MUST FIGHT  
WITH OUR  
BACKS AGAINST  
THE RIVER!



ALL I CAN DO  
IS TRUST IN  
LADY EIKO'S  
FATE...

THE PATH TO  
WORLD PEACE  
IS LONG AND  
ARDUOUS.









〈DAIGINJO...\*〉

A TOP-QUALITY  
SAKE.

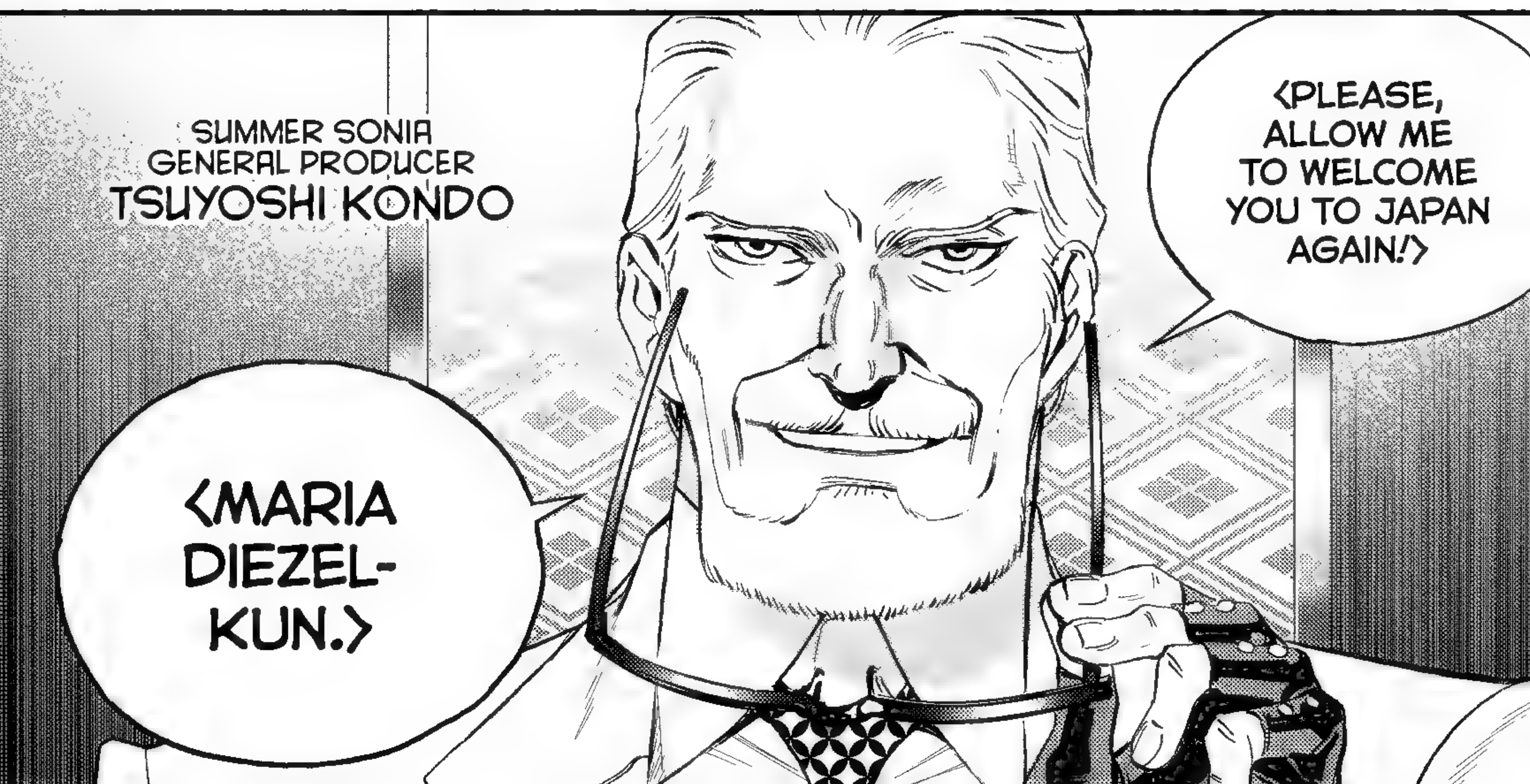
〈...YES, THIS  
IS NOT A BAD  
REWARD AT  
ALL...〉





〈WELL? THE DRINKS HERE AREN'T BAD, ARE THEY?〉

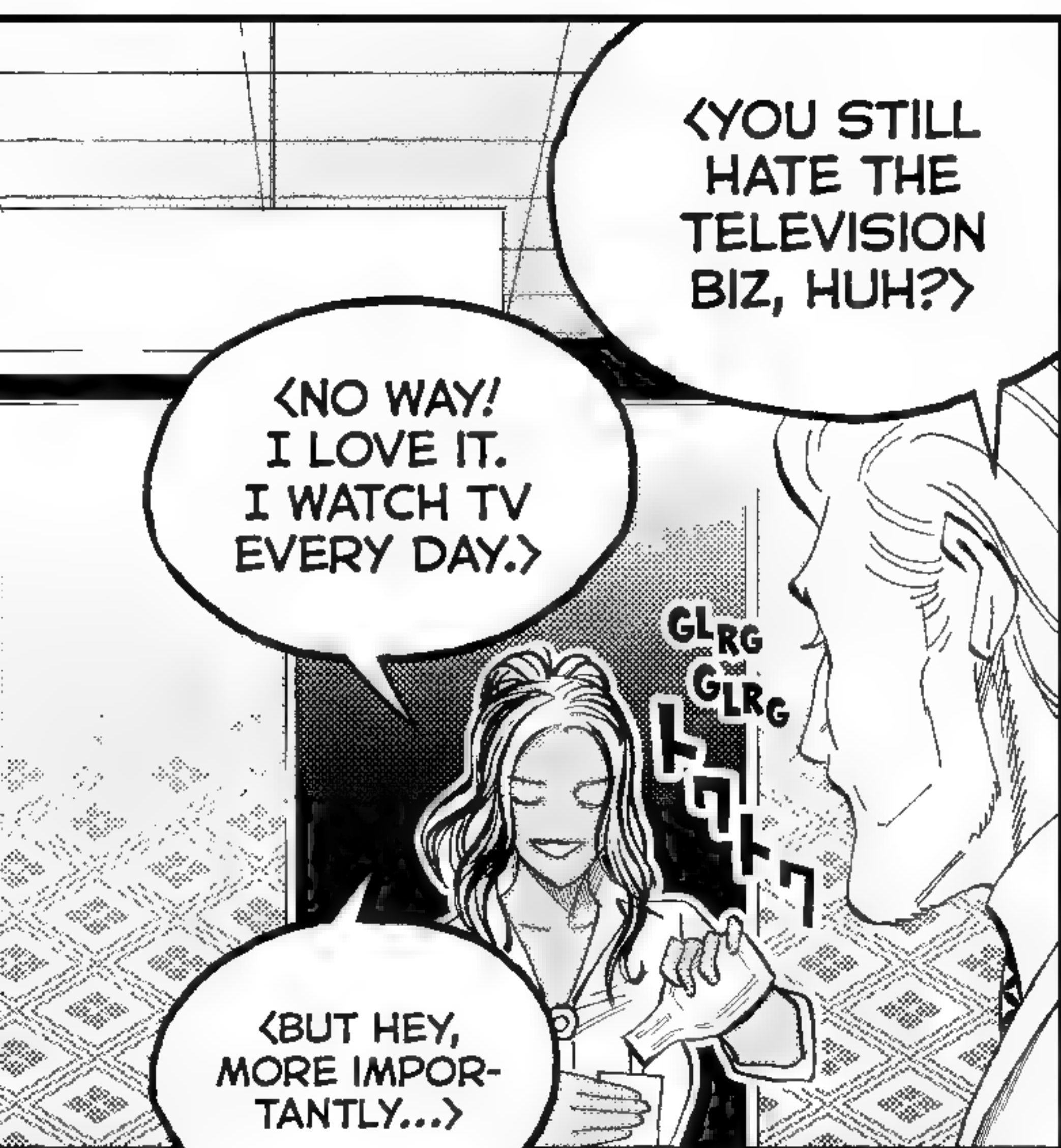
〈"IF YOU WANT TO MEET MARIA, YOU NEED TO FIND QUALITY ALCOHOL."〉



SUMMER SONIA  
GENERAL PRODUCER  
TSUYOSHI KONDO

〈MARIA DIEZEL-KUN.〉

〈PLEASE, ALLOW ME TO WELCOME YOU TO JAPAN AGAIN!〉

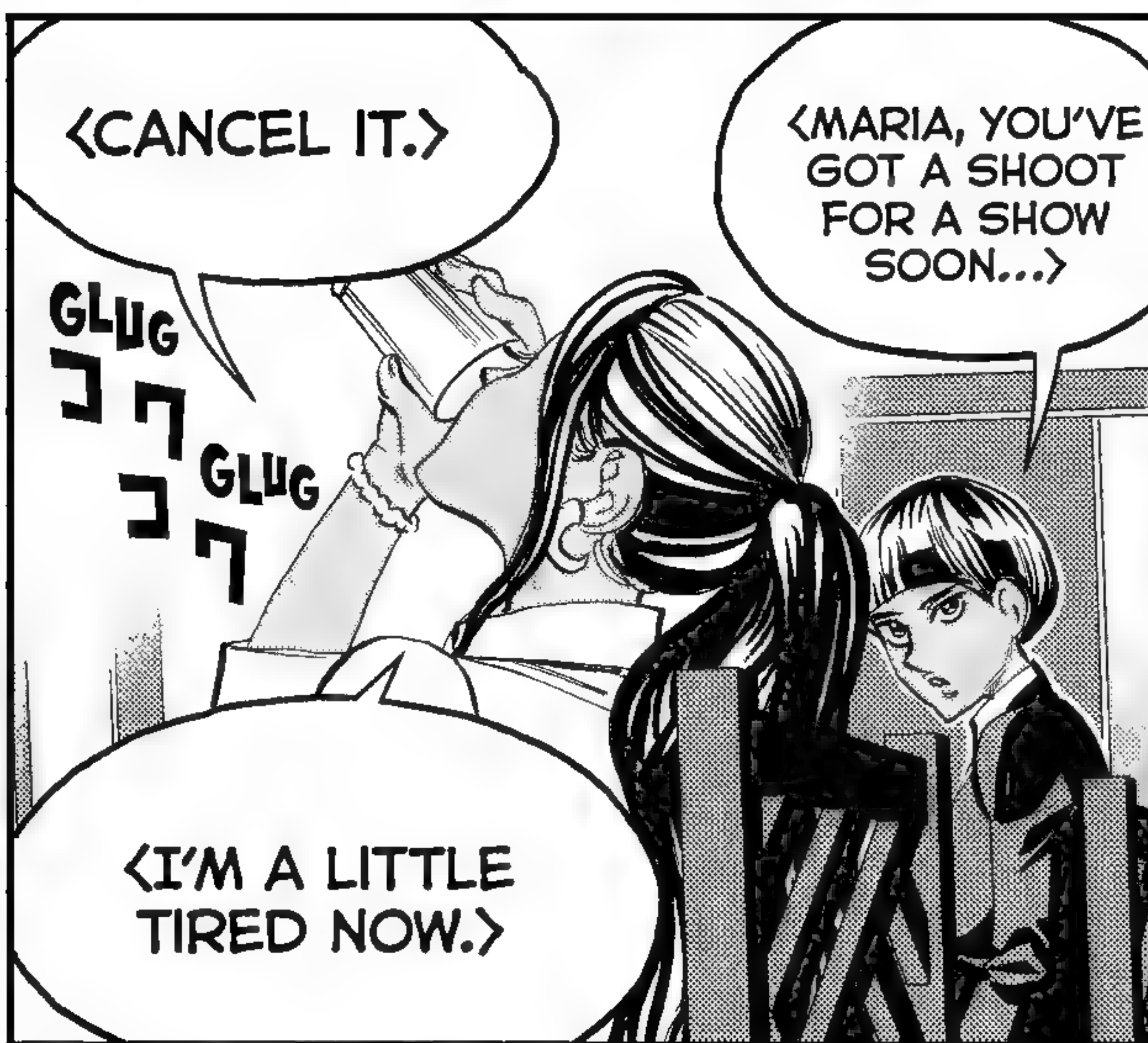


〈NO WAY! I LOVE IT. I WATCH TV EVERY DAY.〉

〈YOU STILL HATE THE TELEVISION BIZ, HUH?〉

〈BUT HEY, MORE IMPORTANTLY...〉

GLRG  
GLRG  
GLRG



〈CANCEL IT.〉

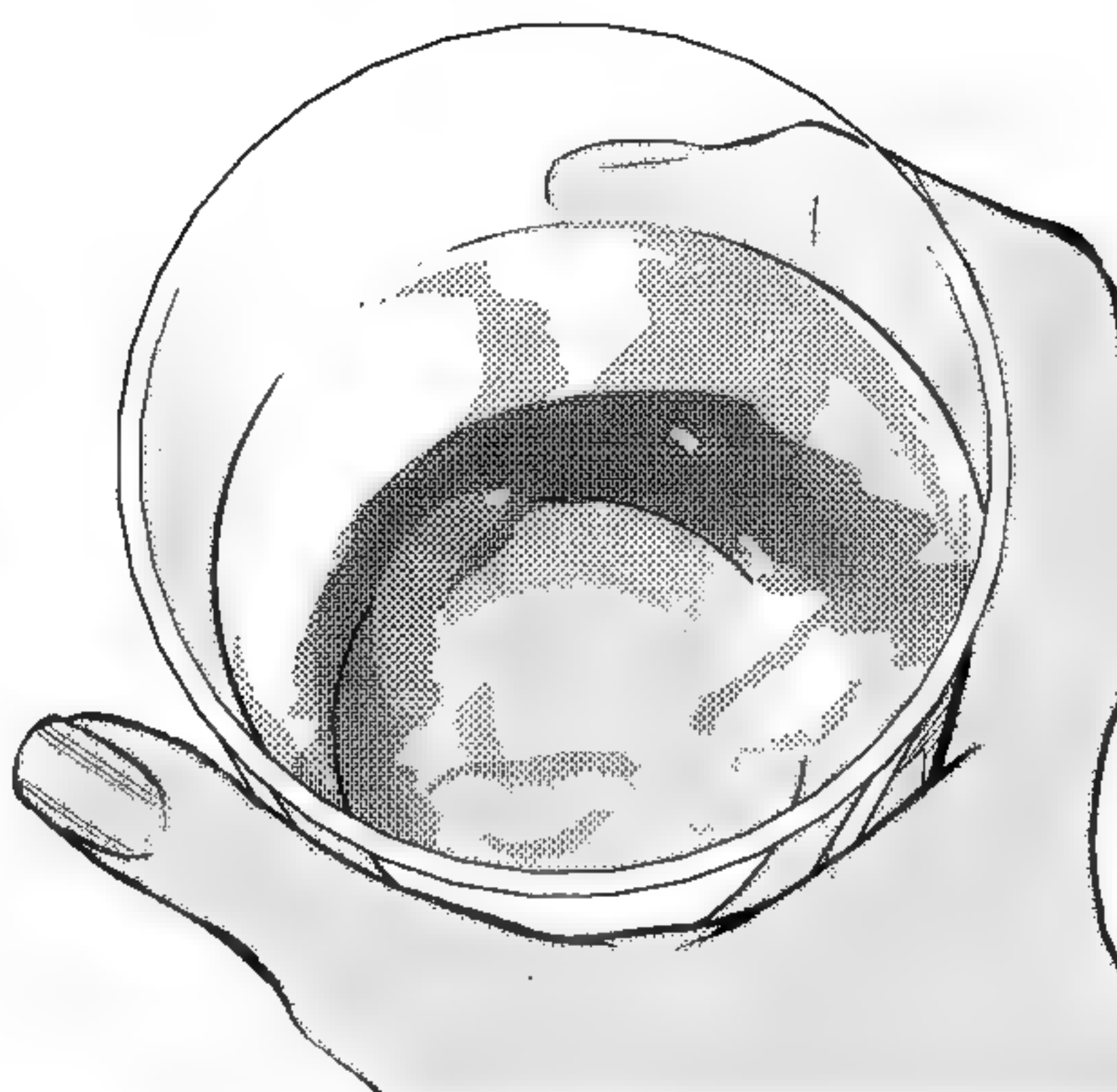
〈MARIA, YOU'VE GOT A SHOOT FOR A SHOW SOON...〉

〈I'M A LITTLE TIRED NOW.〉

GLUG  
GLUG  
GLUG



〈DON'T  
YOU HAVE ANY  
ARTISTS YOU WANT  
TO RECOMMEND  
TO ME?〉



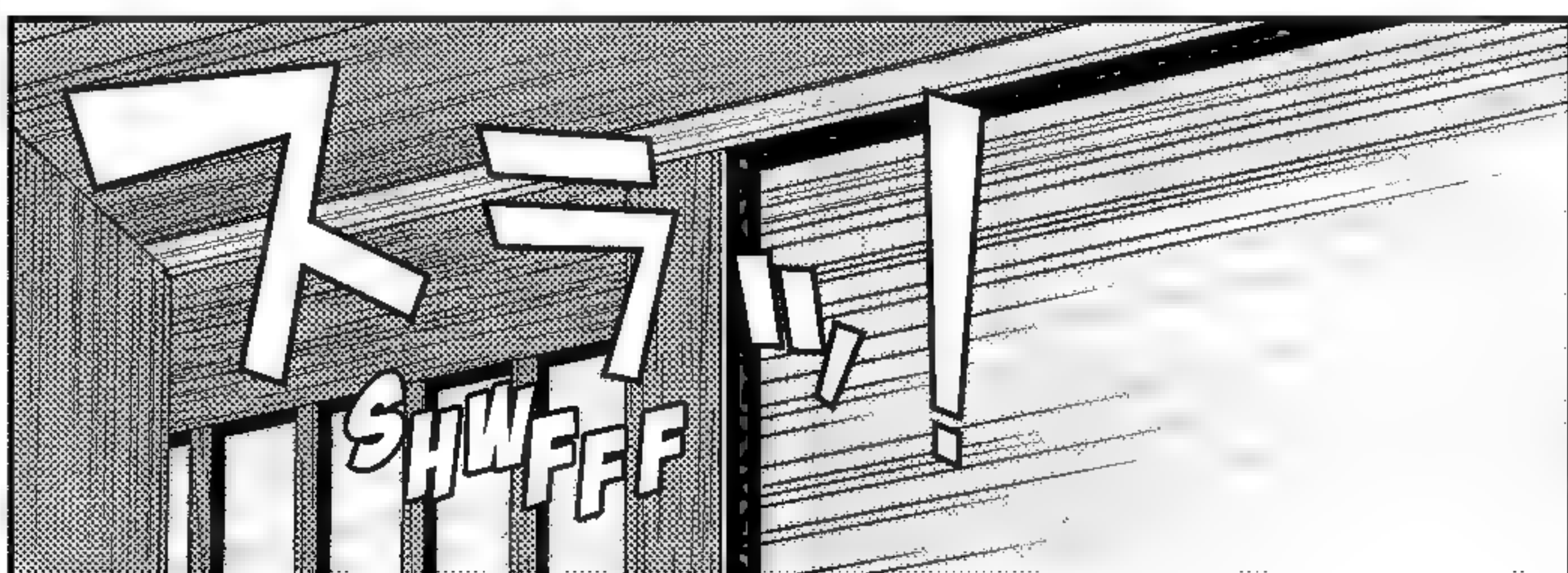
〈...I DON'T  
COME TO  
JAPAN OFTEN.〉

〈I'D LOVE TO  
SEE THE THINGS  
I CAN ONLY  
SEE HERE.〉

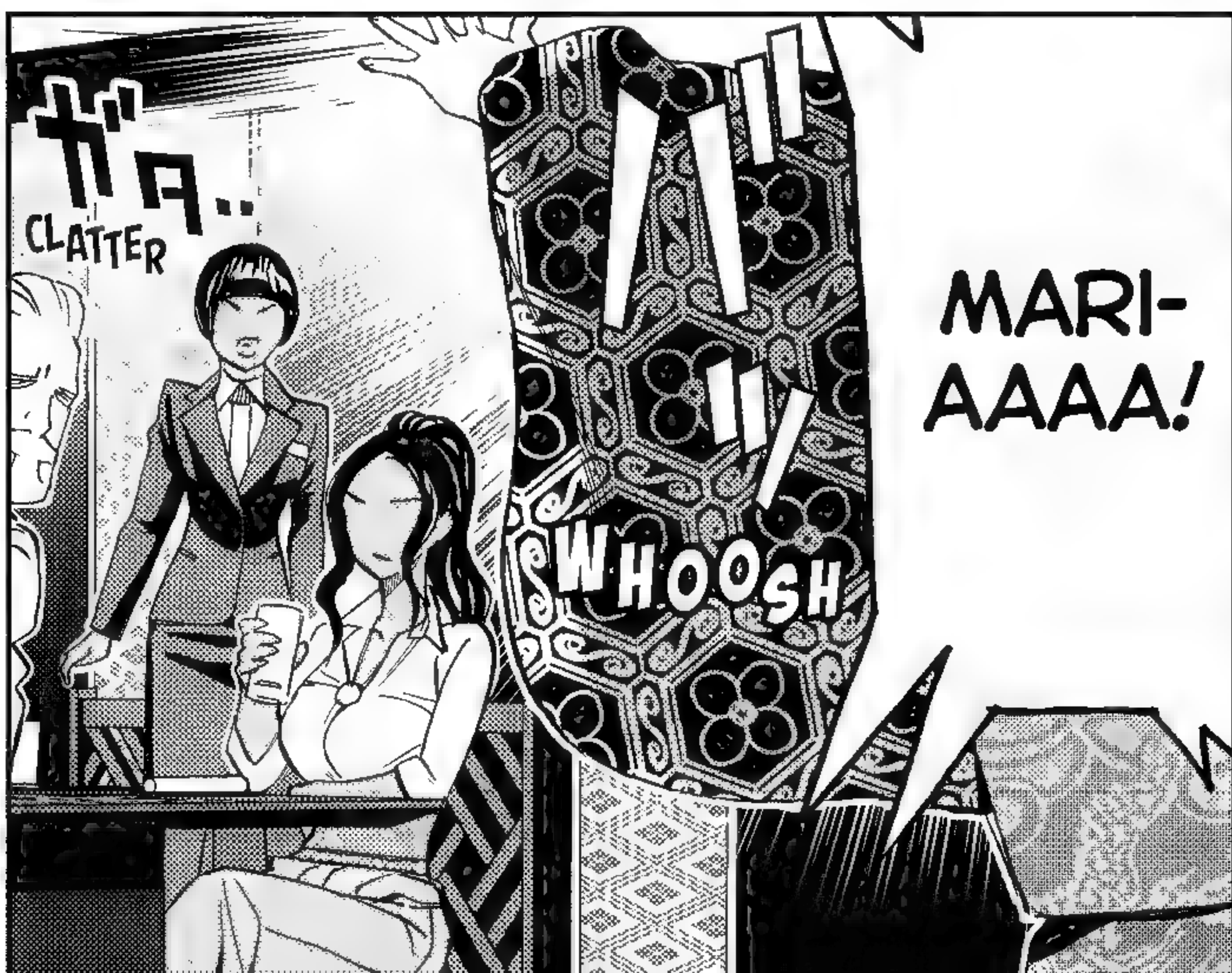


〈WELL,  
IN THAT  
CASE...〉

〈YOU'RE AFTER  
RECOMMENDA-  
TIONS, THEN...?〉



EXCUSE  
ME! YOU  
CAN'T GO  
THERE!!



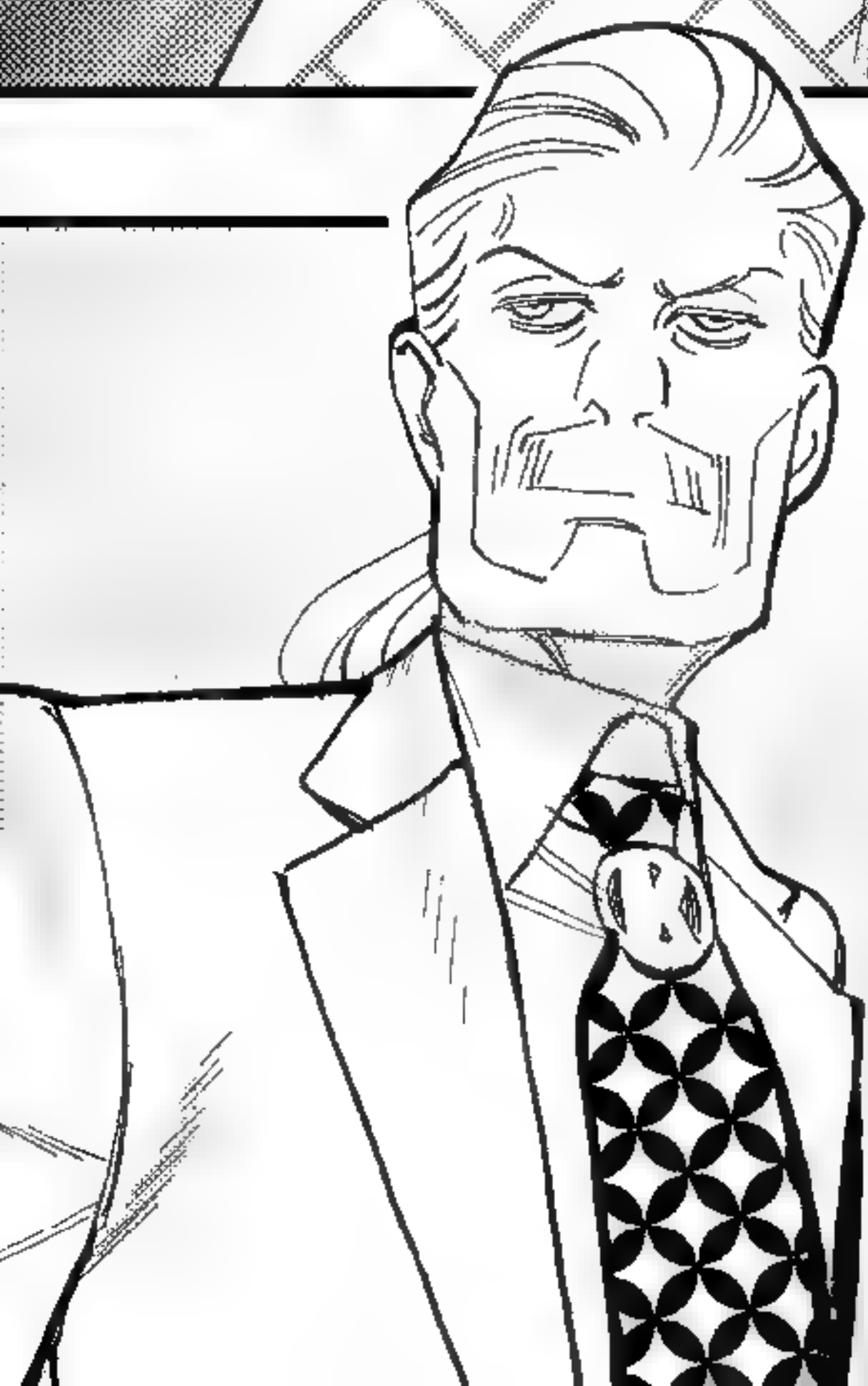
MARI-  
AAAA!



WELCOME TO JAPAN!!

BA-BAM

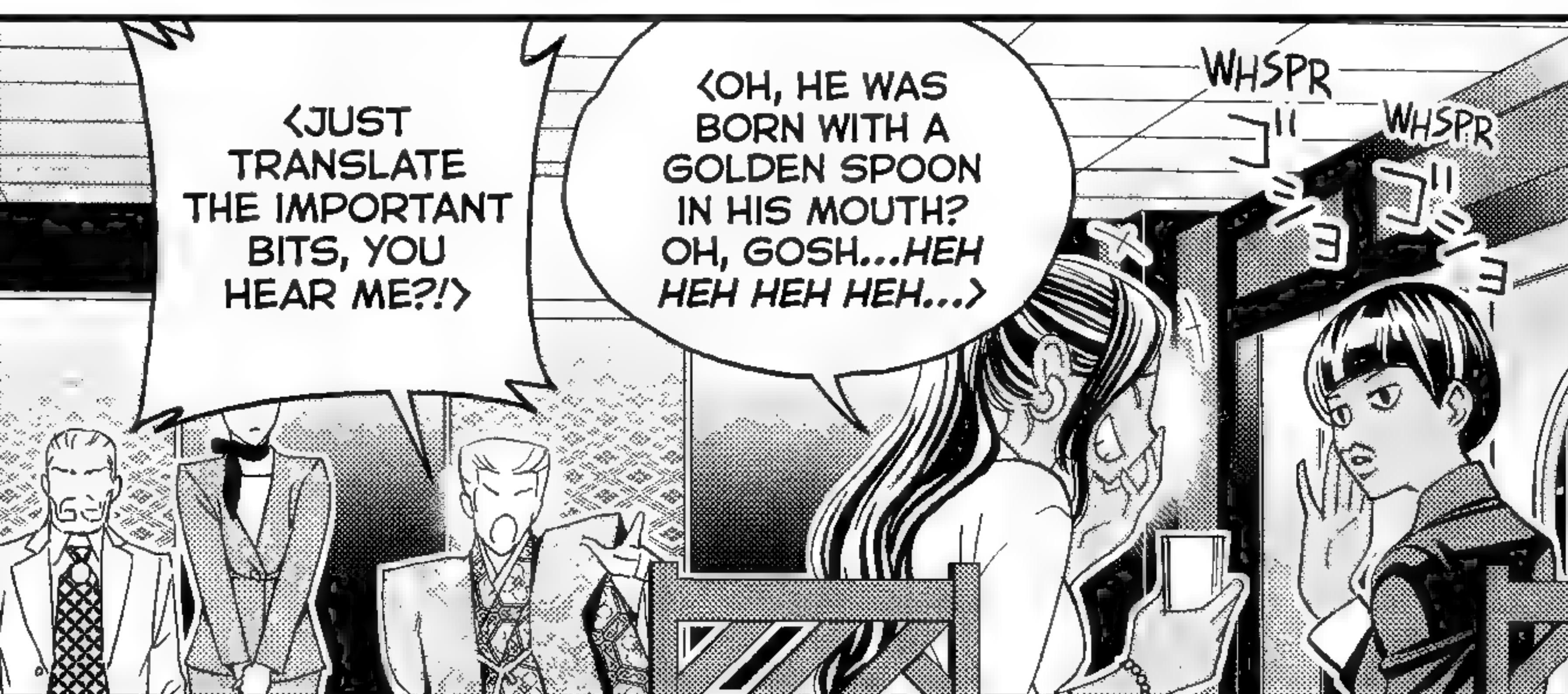
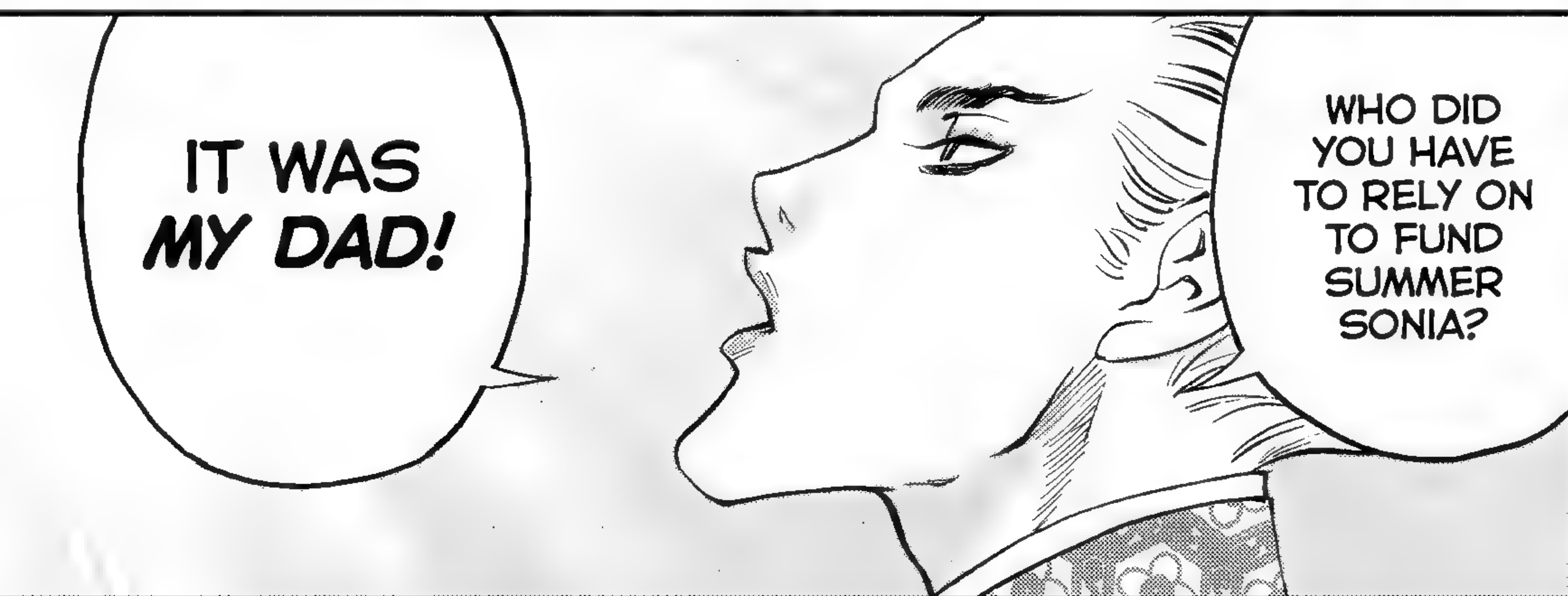
〈WOW! THIS  
IS THAT *KABUKI*  
THING, RIGHT?〉



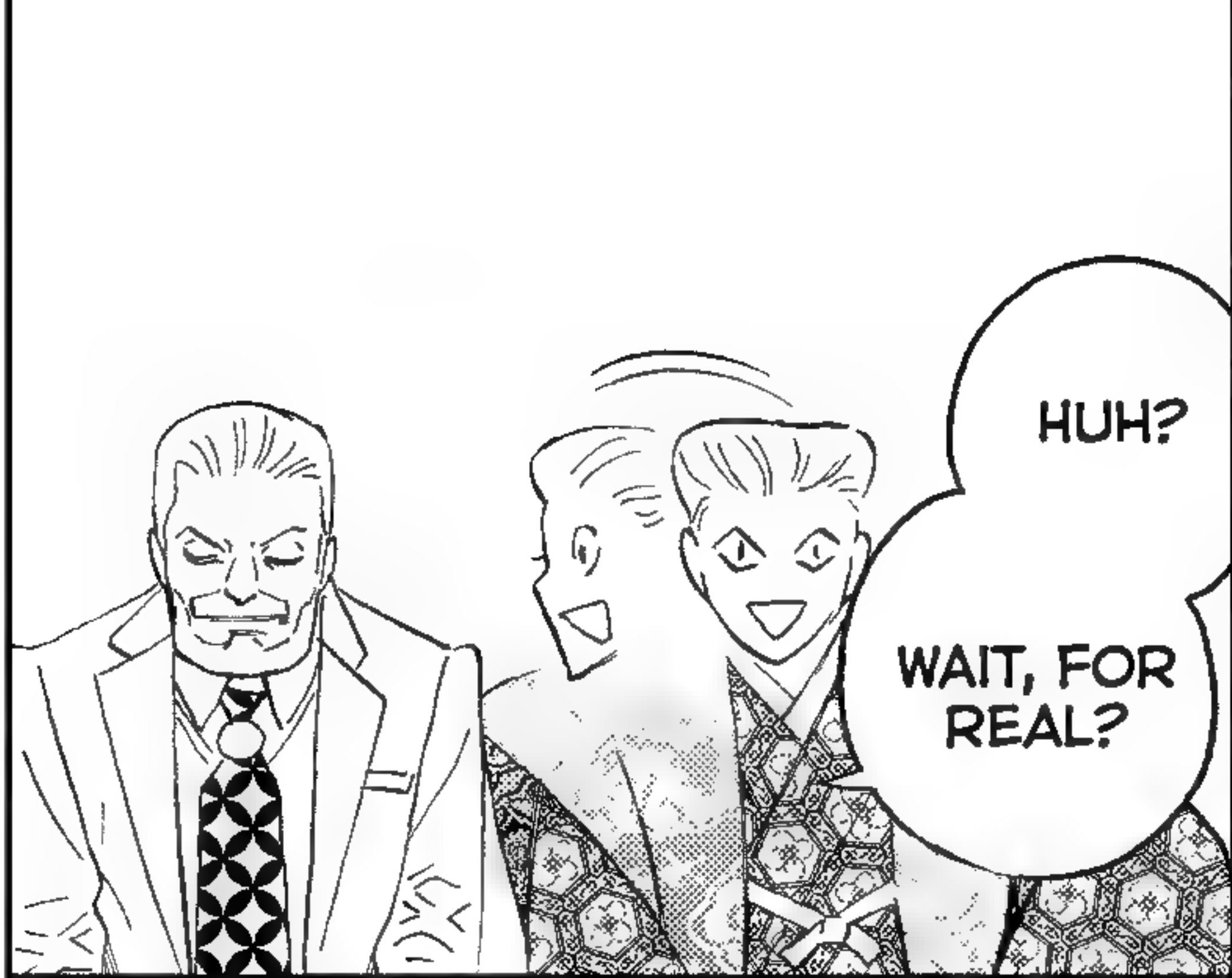












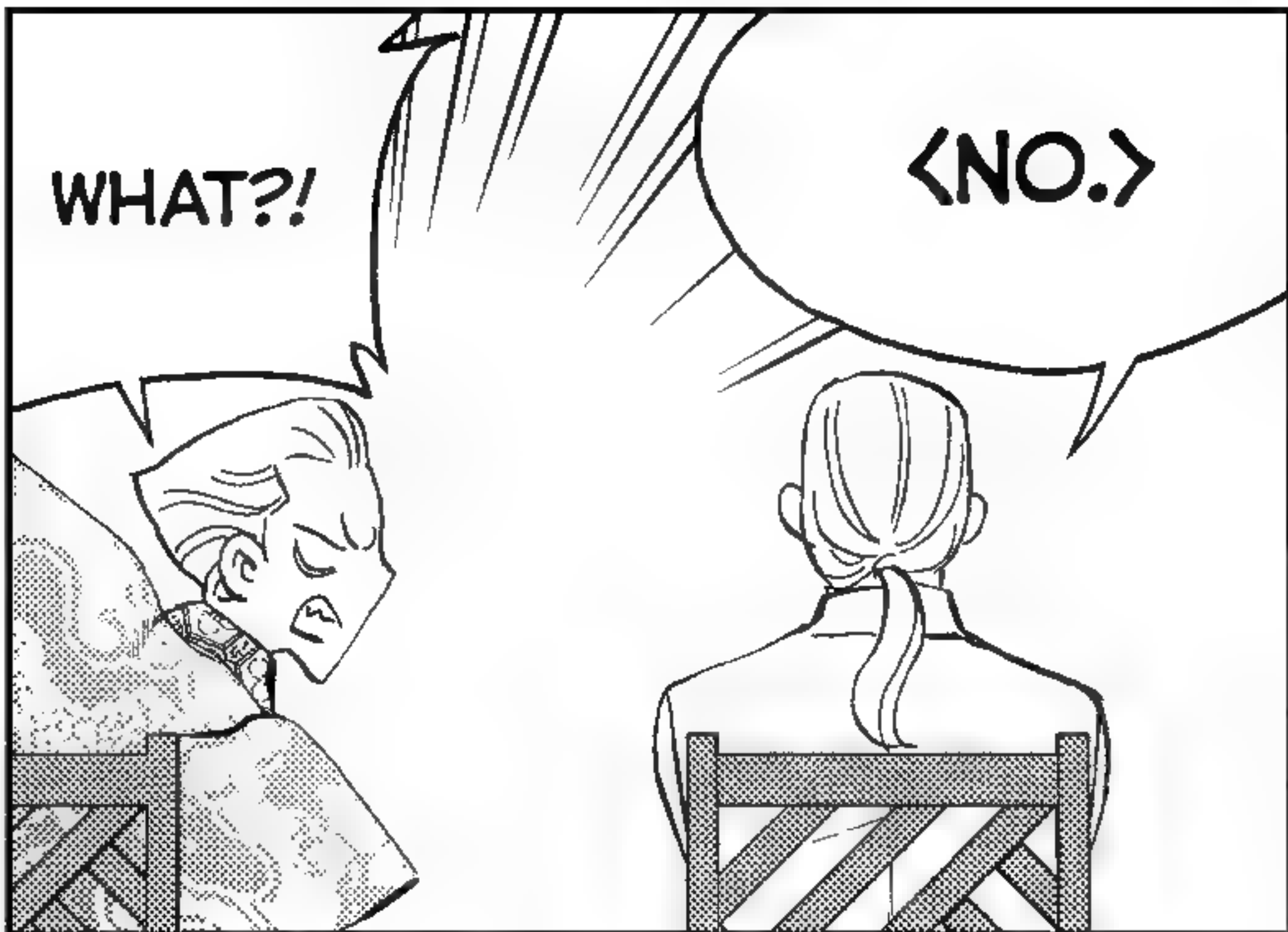
HUH?

WAIT, FOR  
REAL?



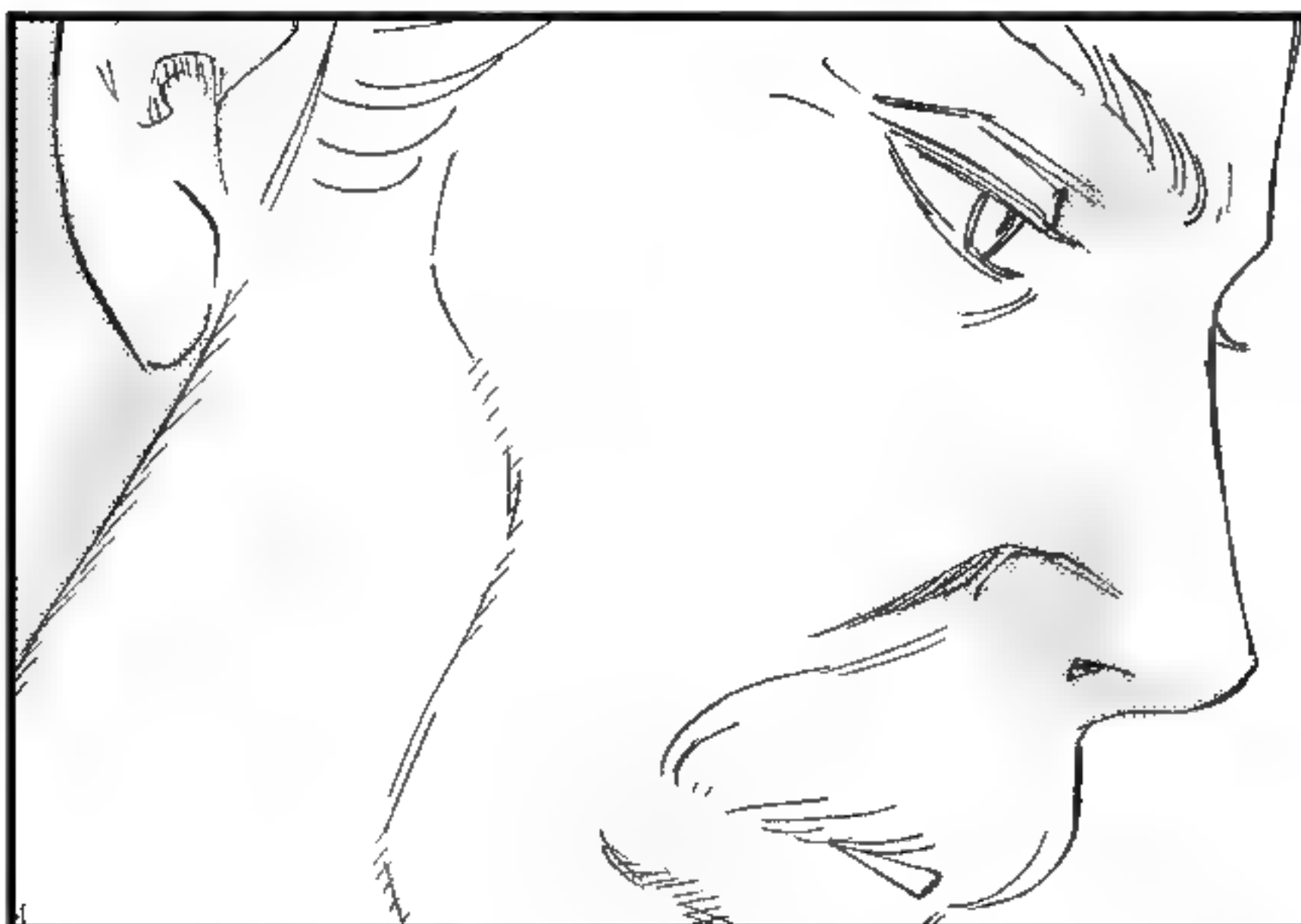
〈YOU WERE  
ABOUT TO REC AN  
ARTIST TO ME. COULD  
IT BE THAT IT'S...〉

〈...HIM?〉

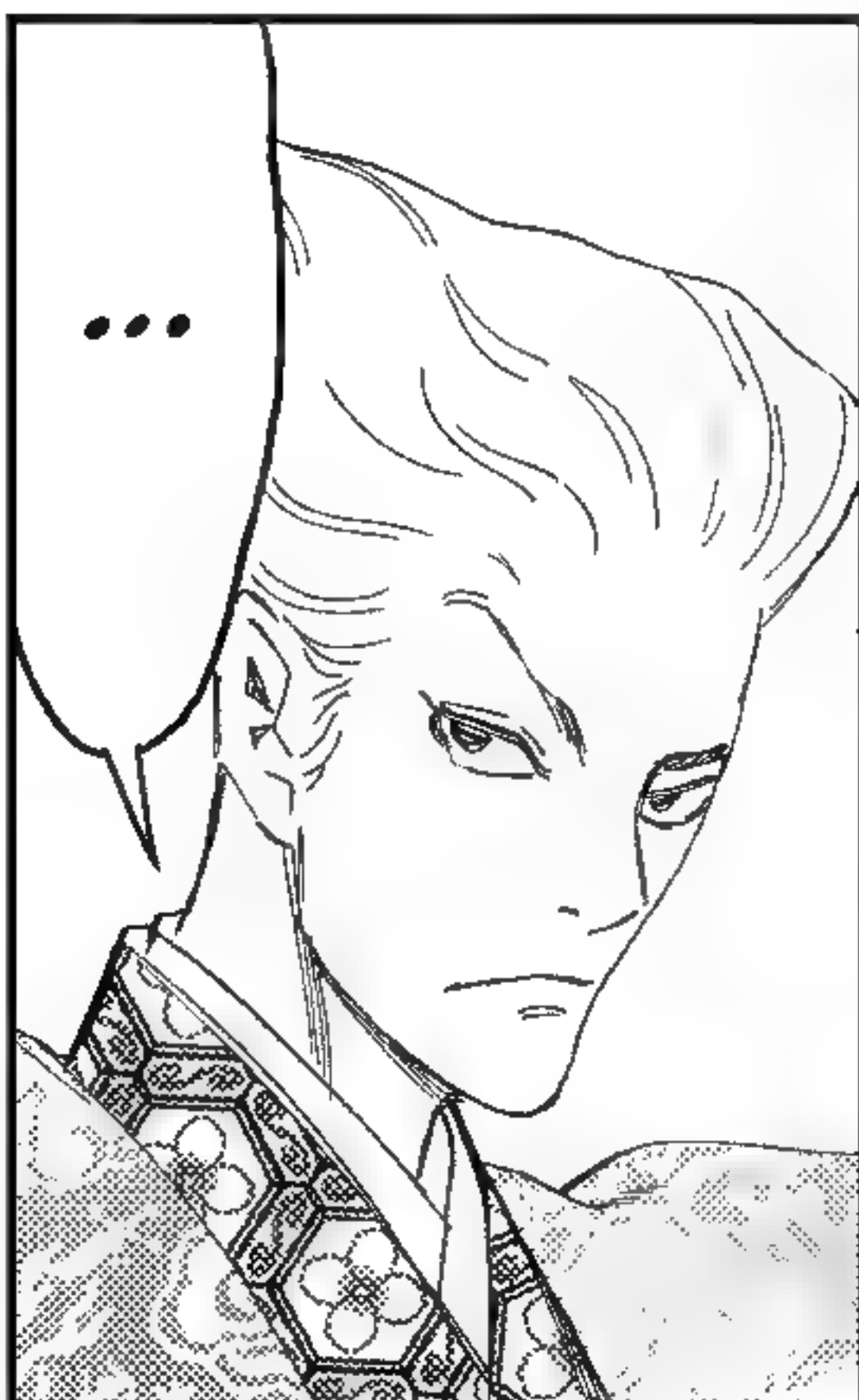


WHAT?!

〈NO.〉



〈THE ARTIST I  
WANT YOU TO  
SEE IS...〉



...



〈IS...WHO?〉





〈YOU  
TIGHTWAD!〉

〈WHY?!〉

〈I'LL  
REFRAIN FROM  
REVEALING  
THEIR NAME  
FOR NOW.〉

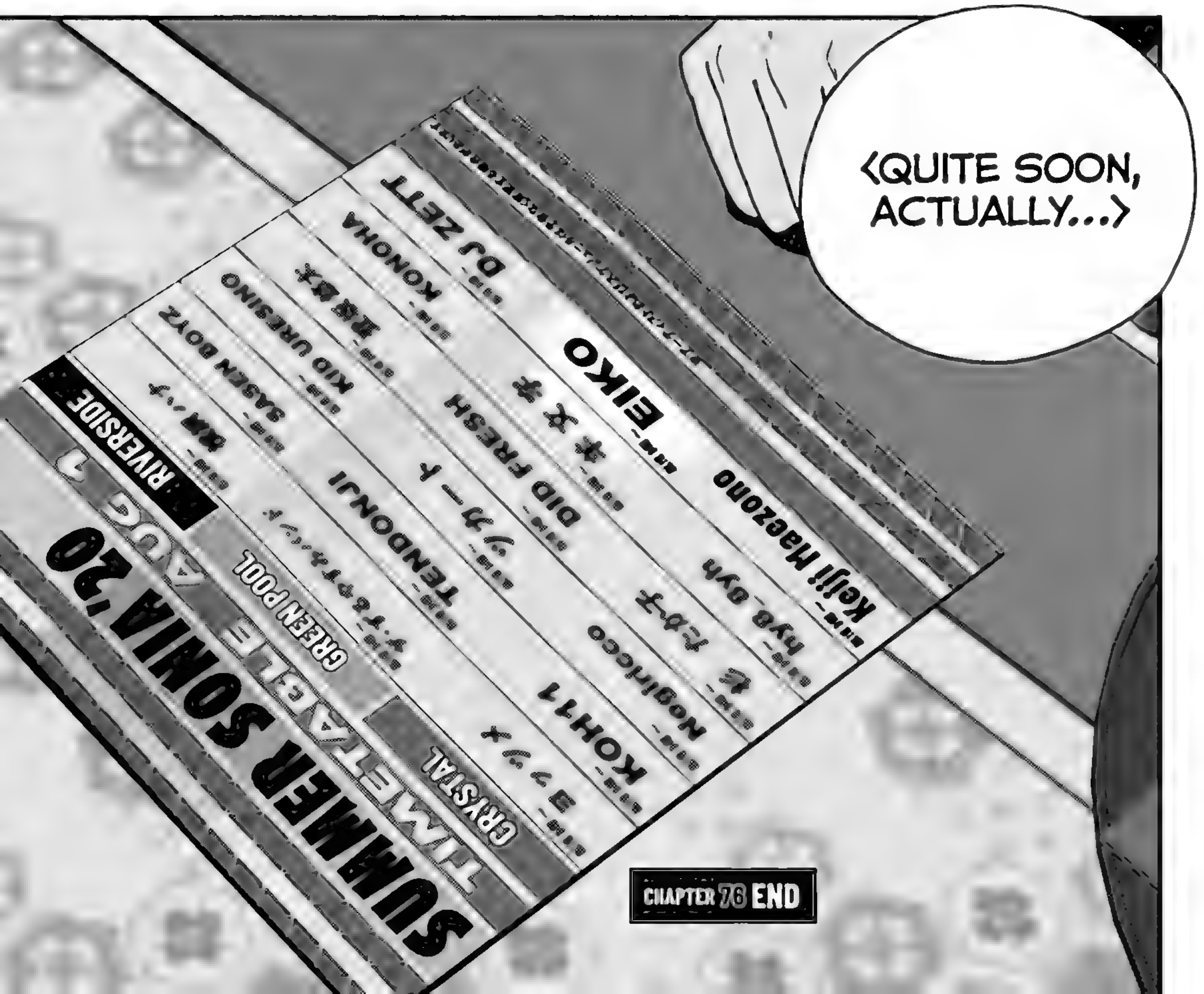


〈FORGET  
IT...〉



〈...YOU'LL  
MEET THEM  
EVENTUALLY.〉

〈IT'S  
FINE...〉



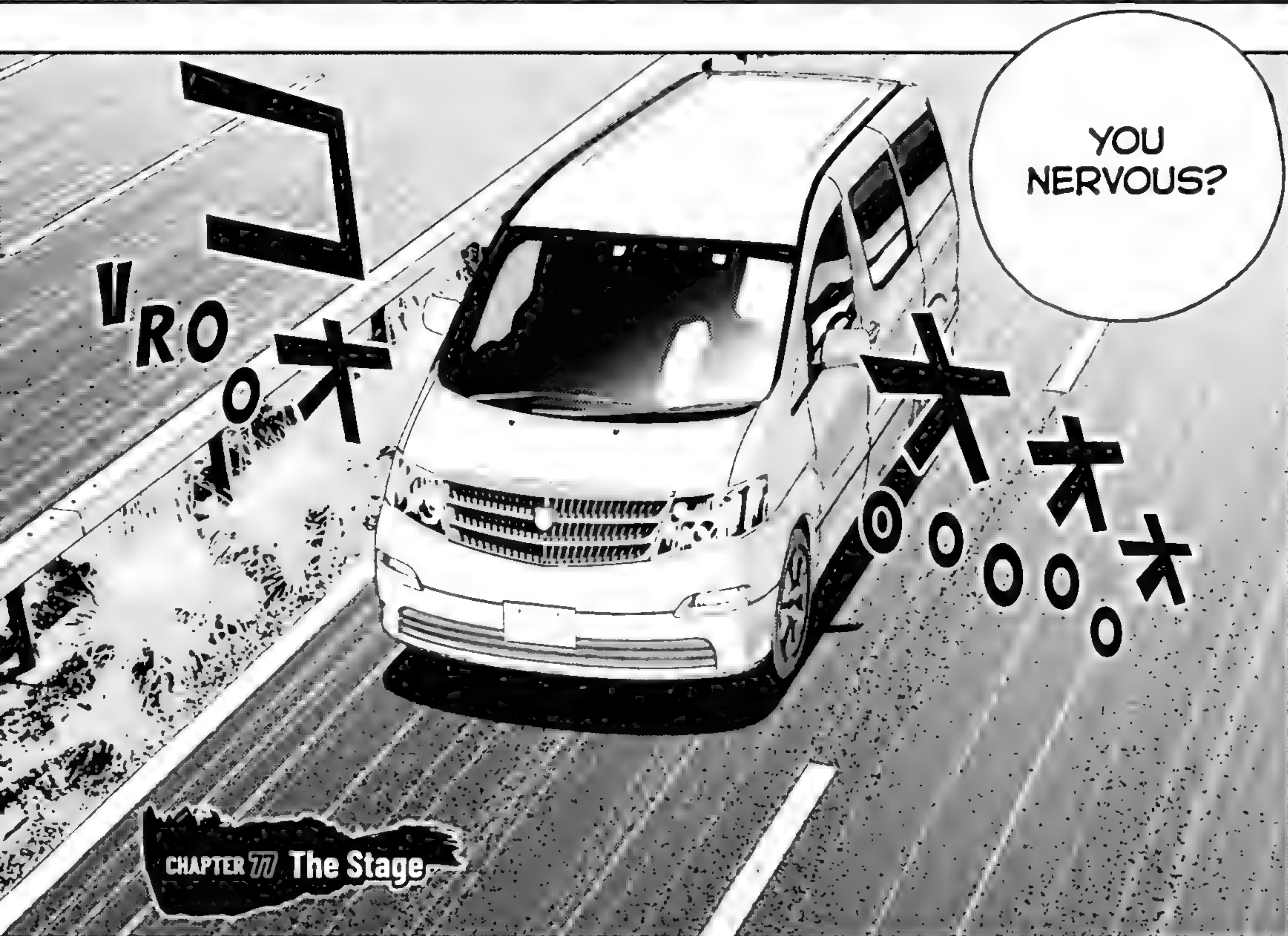
〈QUITE SOON,  
ACTUALLY...〉

CHAPTER 26 END



1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!









I WONDER ABOUT THAT. HE SEEMS PRETTY POPULAR, BUT I'VE GOT MY DOUBTS.

APPARENTLY HE THINKS UP HIS OWN SONGS, CHOREOGRAPHY, AND PERFORMANCES, ALL ON HIS OWN.

UGH, I HATE THEIR SCHEDULING TEAM!

OH, COME ON! OUR TIME SLOTS ARE THE SAME... WHAT IF NO ONE SHOWS UP AT MY STAGE?



**KEIJI MAEZONO!**

hy8\_8yh

**KEIJI MAEZONO**



WHO'S PERFORMING THE SAME TIME AS YOU, EIKO?

DJ ZETT AT THE RIVERSIDE STAGE...AND ON THE MAIN STAGE IS...



THERE'RE SO MANY PEOPLE I WANNA SEE.

MARIA DIEZEL'S GONNA BE THERE, RIGHT?

AND CLEAN BAND... TAXI...



KONG-MING?

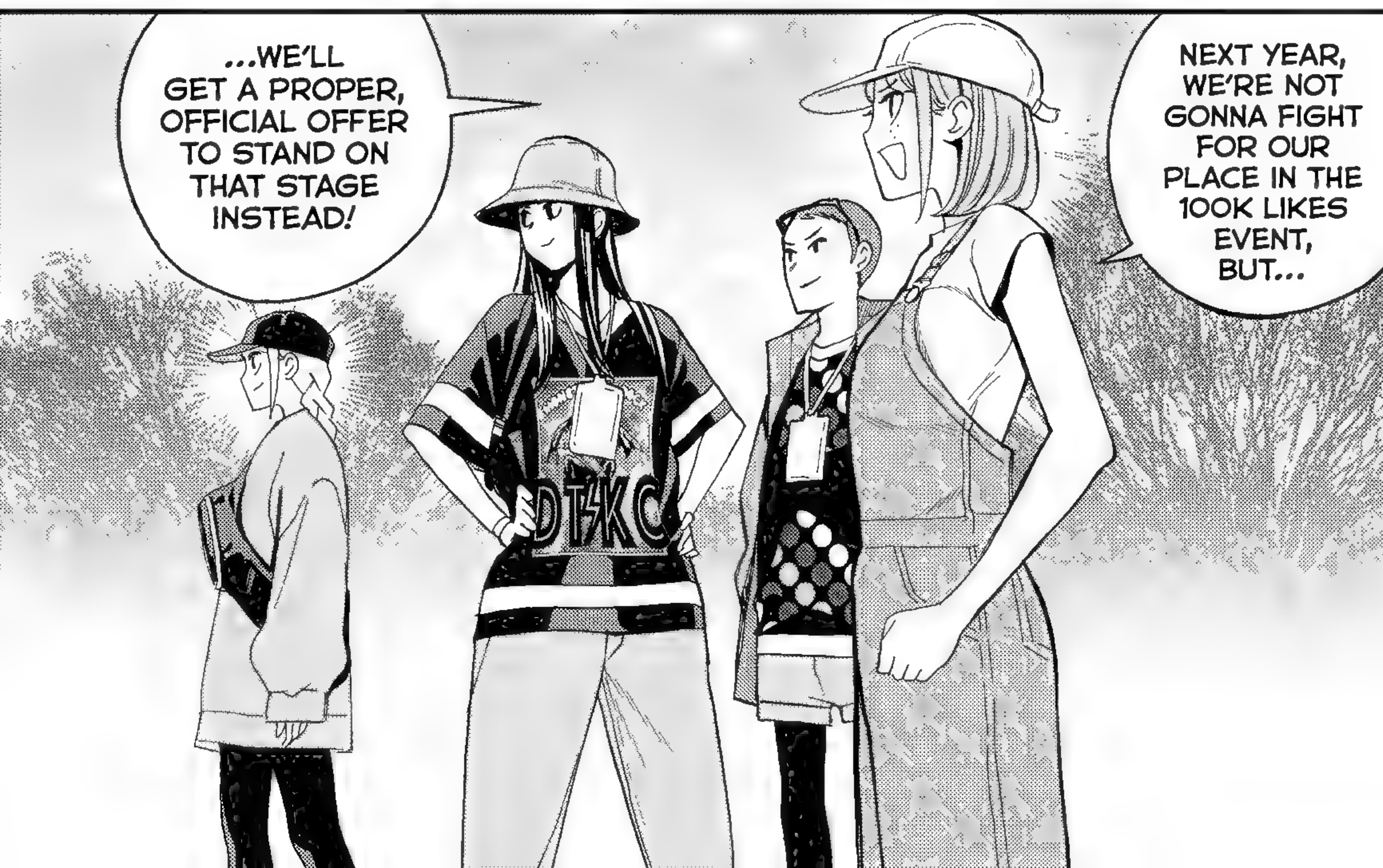
HE'LL MEET US THERE.

SO WHERE'S YOUR MANAGER, BY THE WAY?

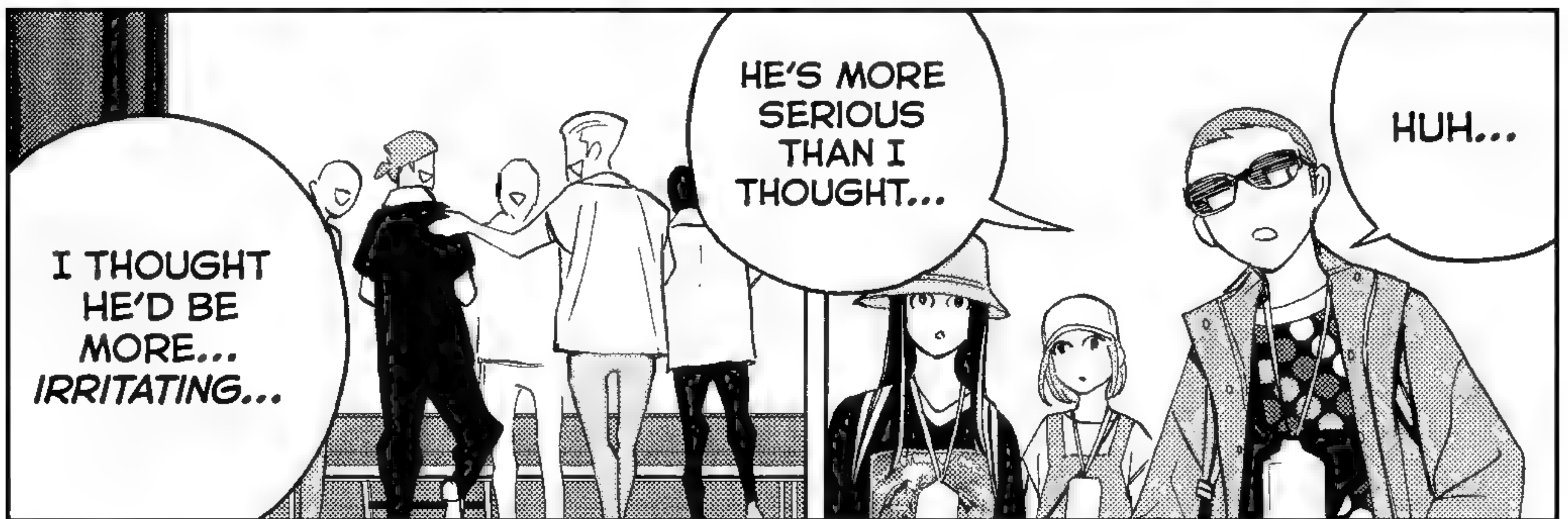
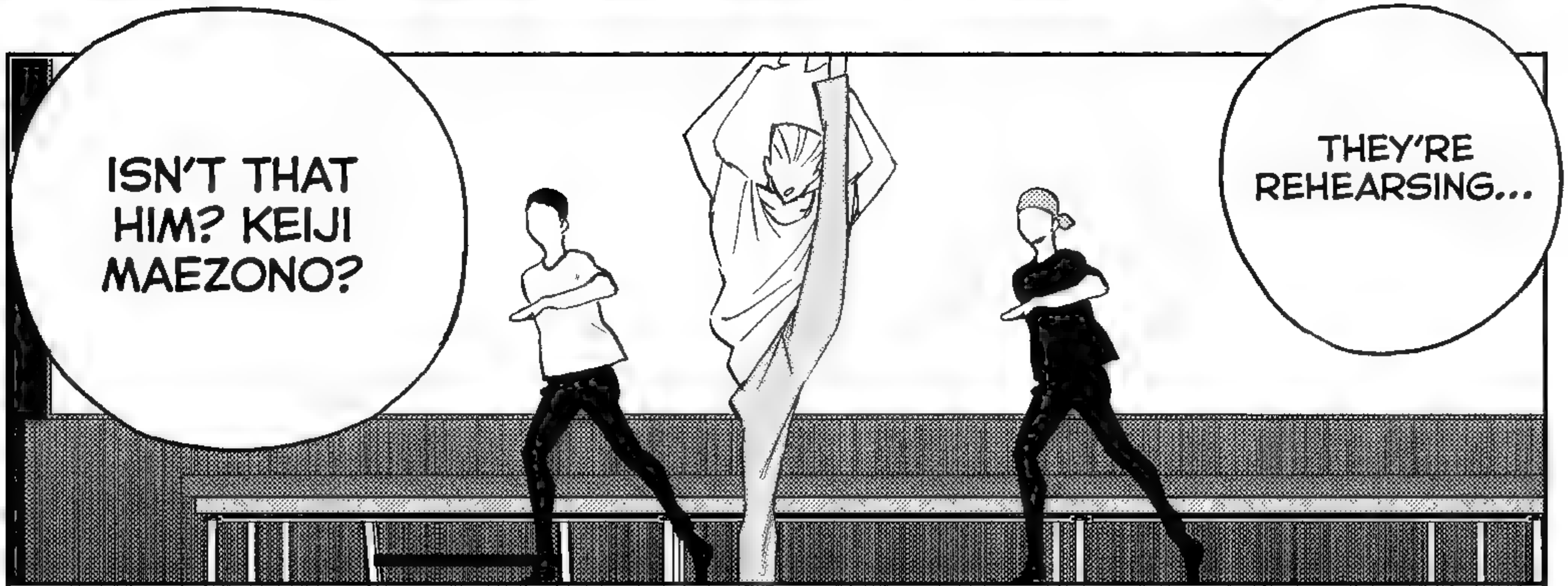
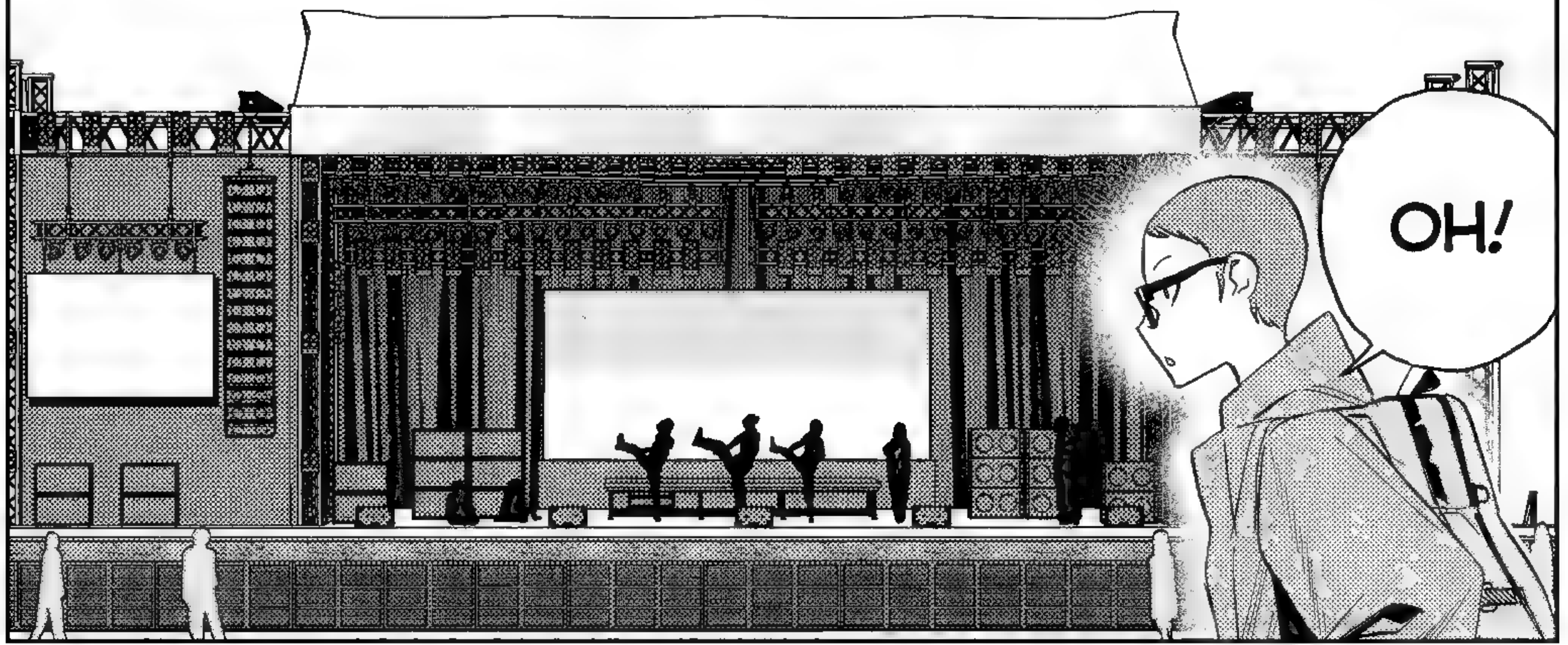














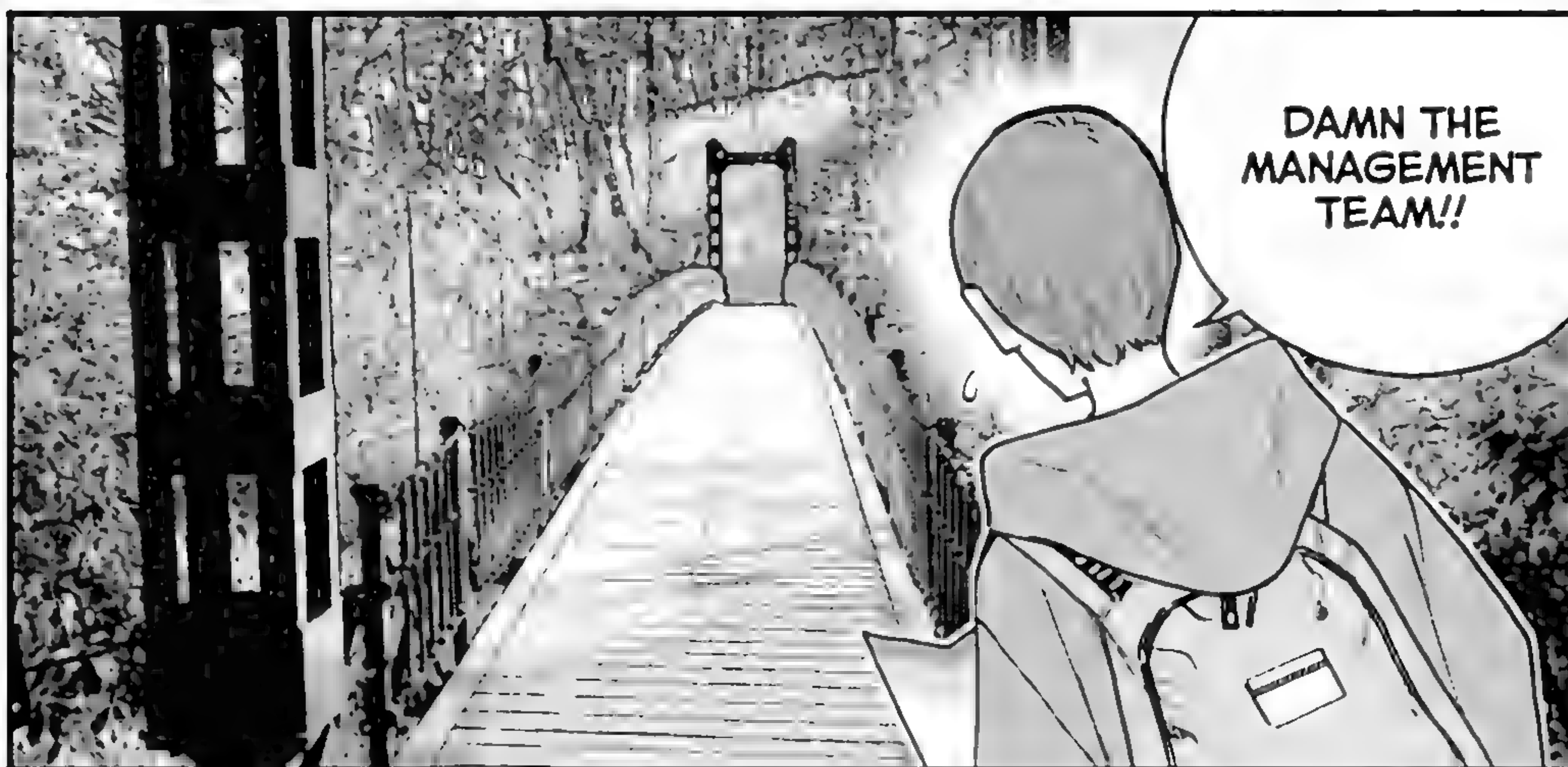


THERE'S A RIVER IN THE WAY, SO WE CAN'T JUST WALK THERE DIRECTLY.

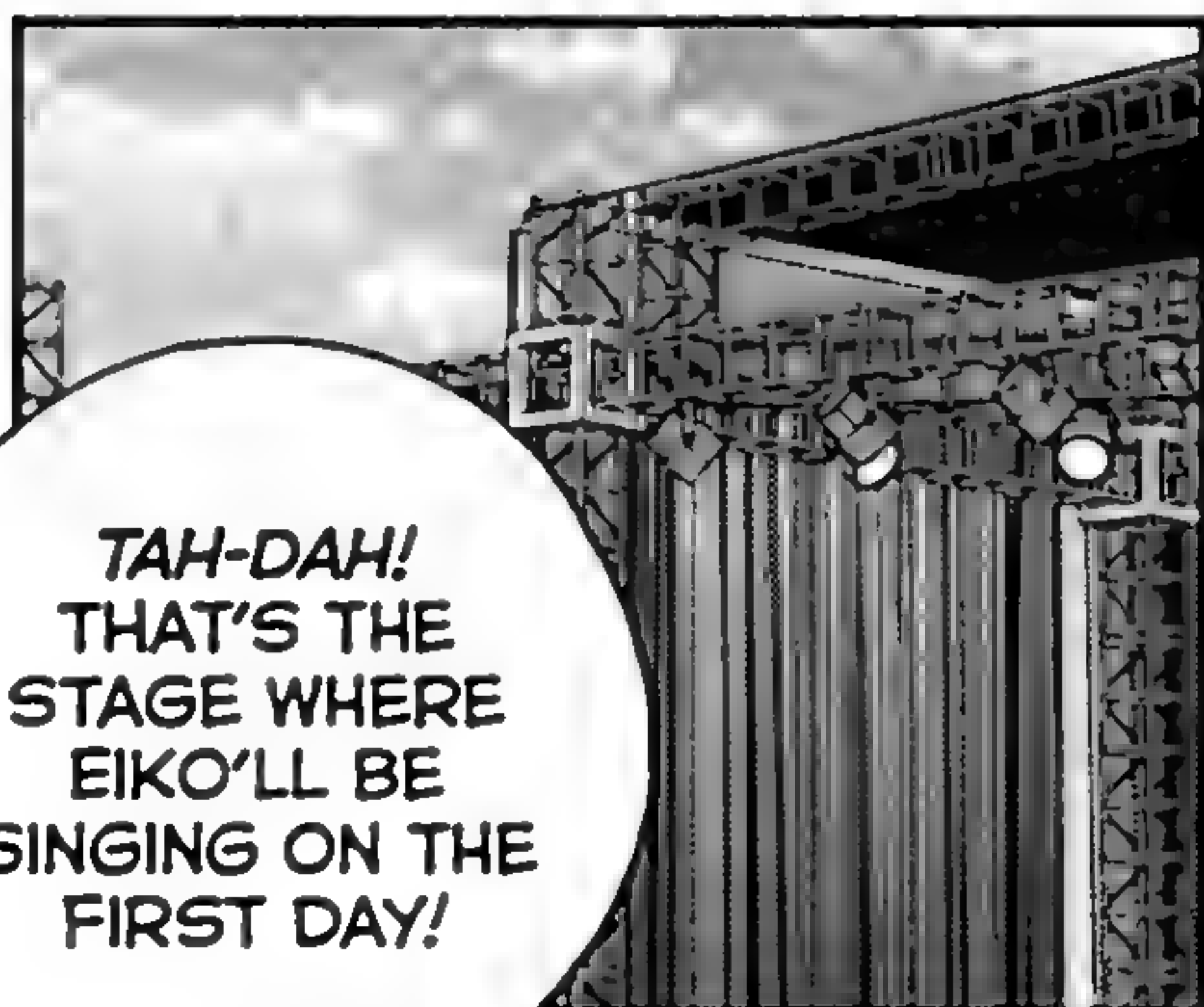
...YOUR STAGE IS A LITTLE FAR, ISN'T IT?

BUT, HEY...

SHK



DAMN THE MANAGEMENT TEAM!!



TAH-DAH!  
THAT'S THE STAGE WHERE EIKO'LL BE SINGING ON THE FIRST DAY!



HEY, I SEE IT!







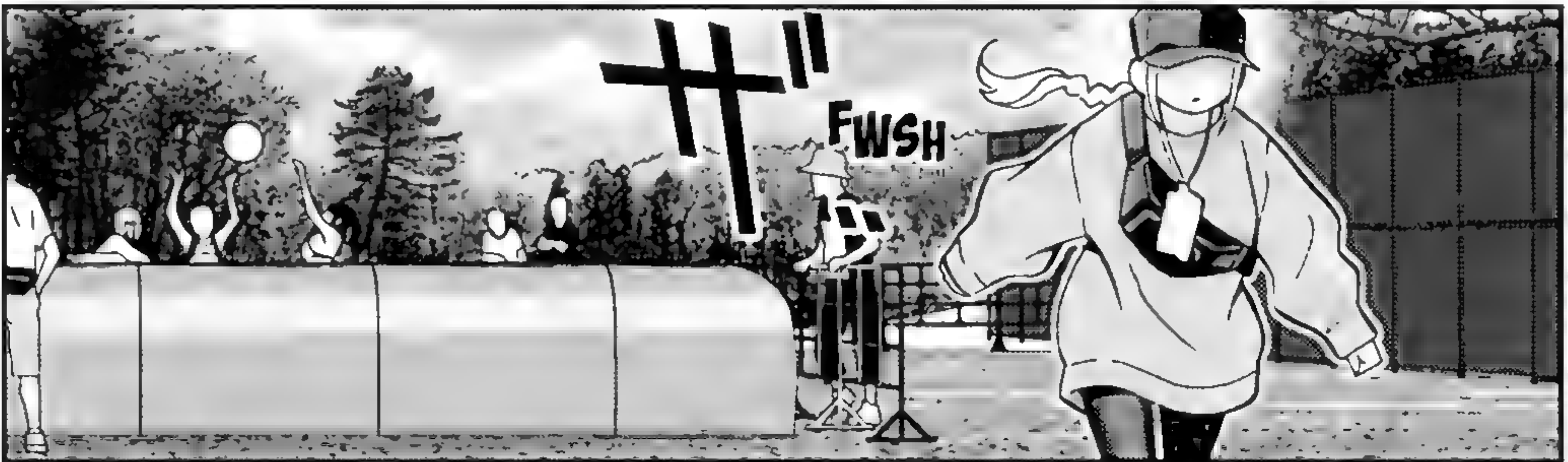
GOOD LUCK ON  
YOUR REHEARSAL!

WELL, AREN'T  
YOU GIRLS  
PREPARED?!

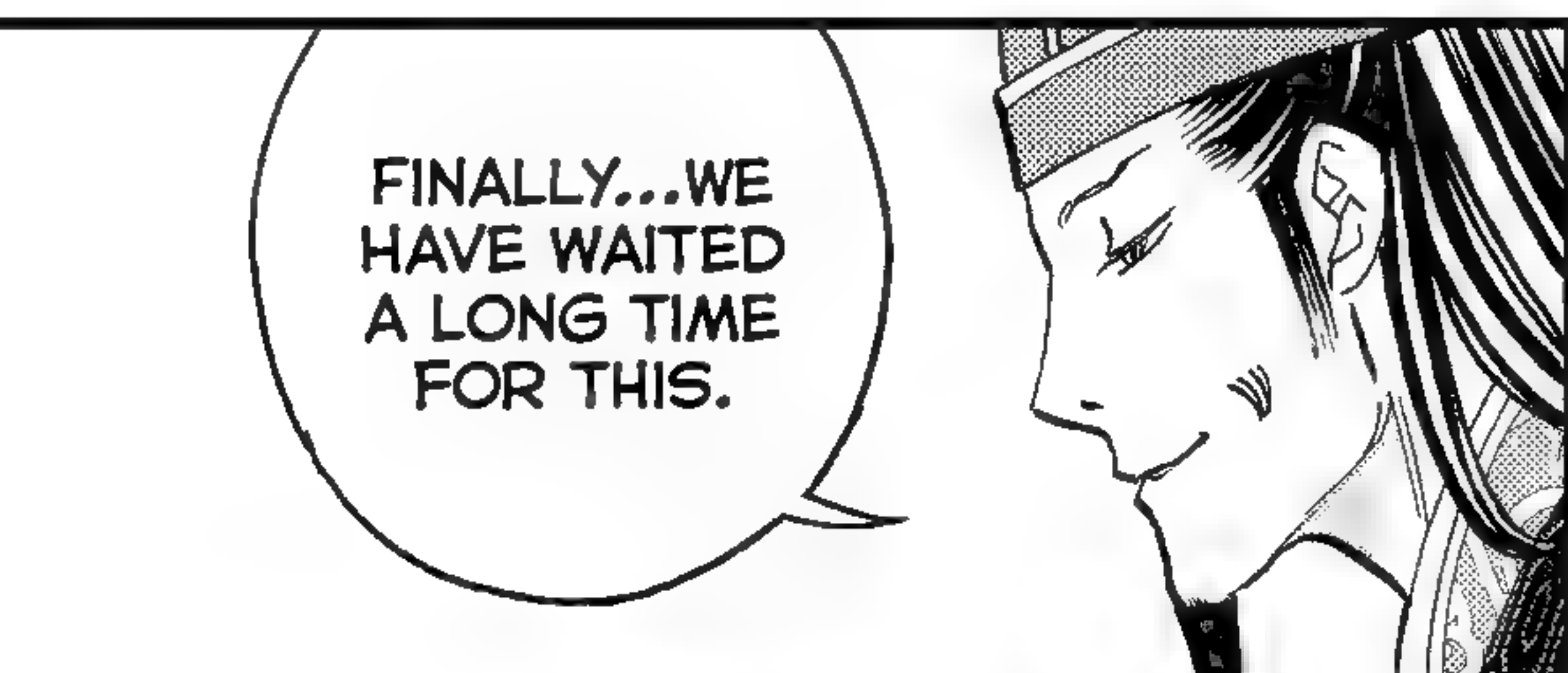
YAAAY  
イエー







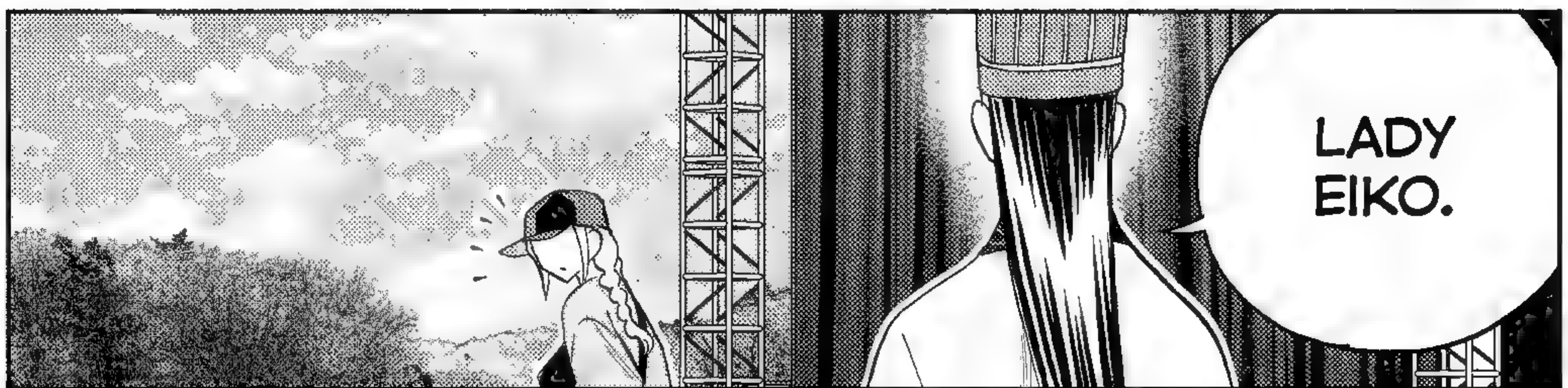
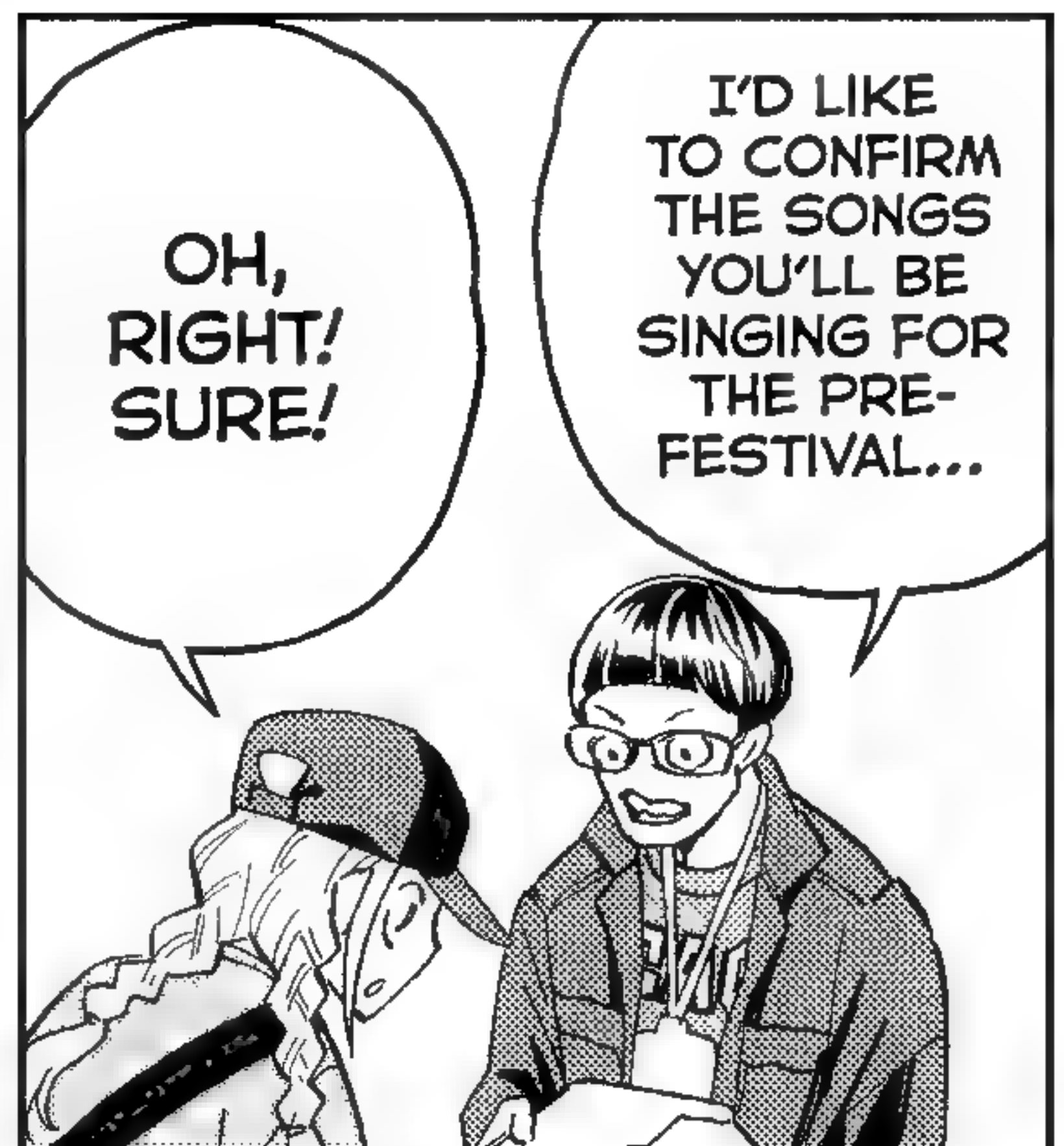








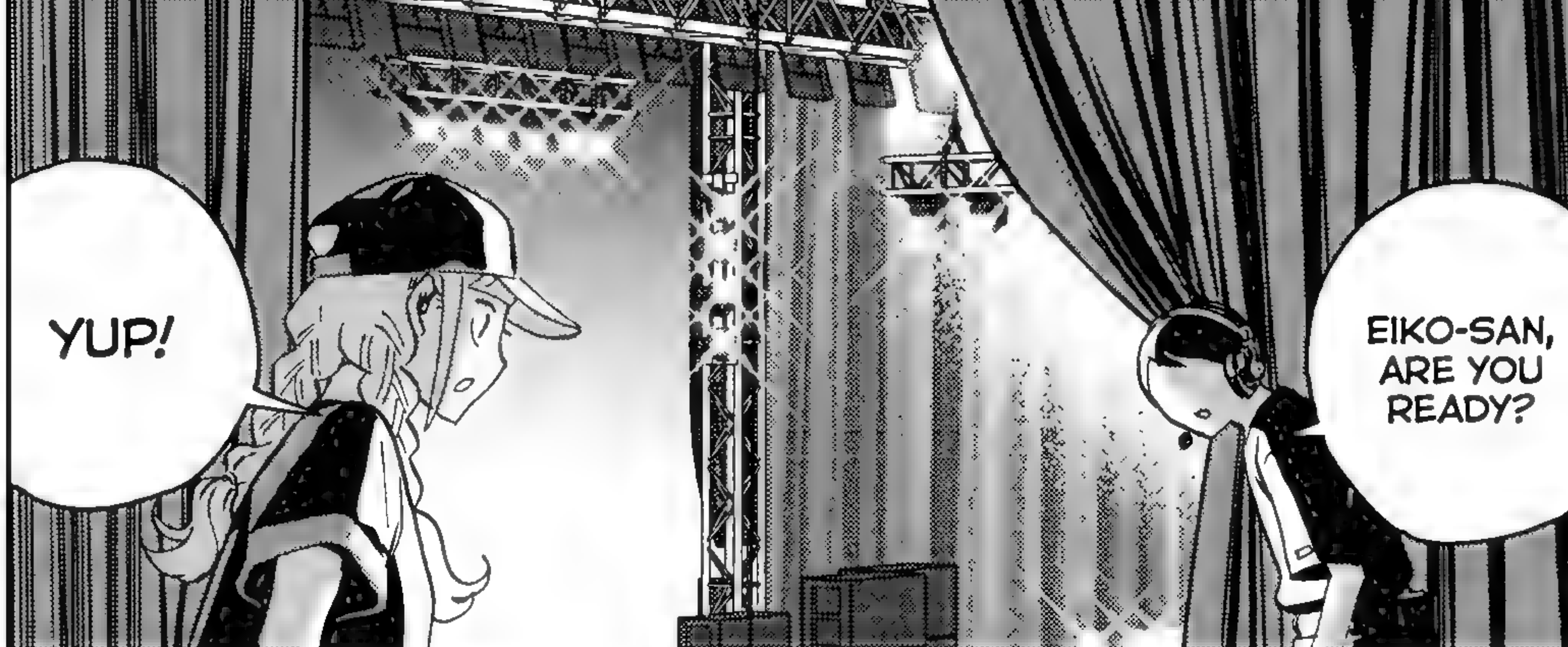




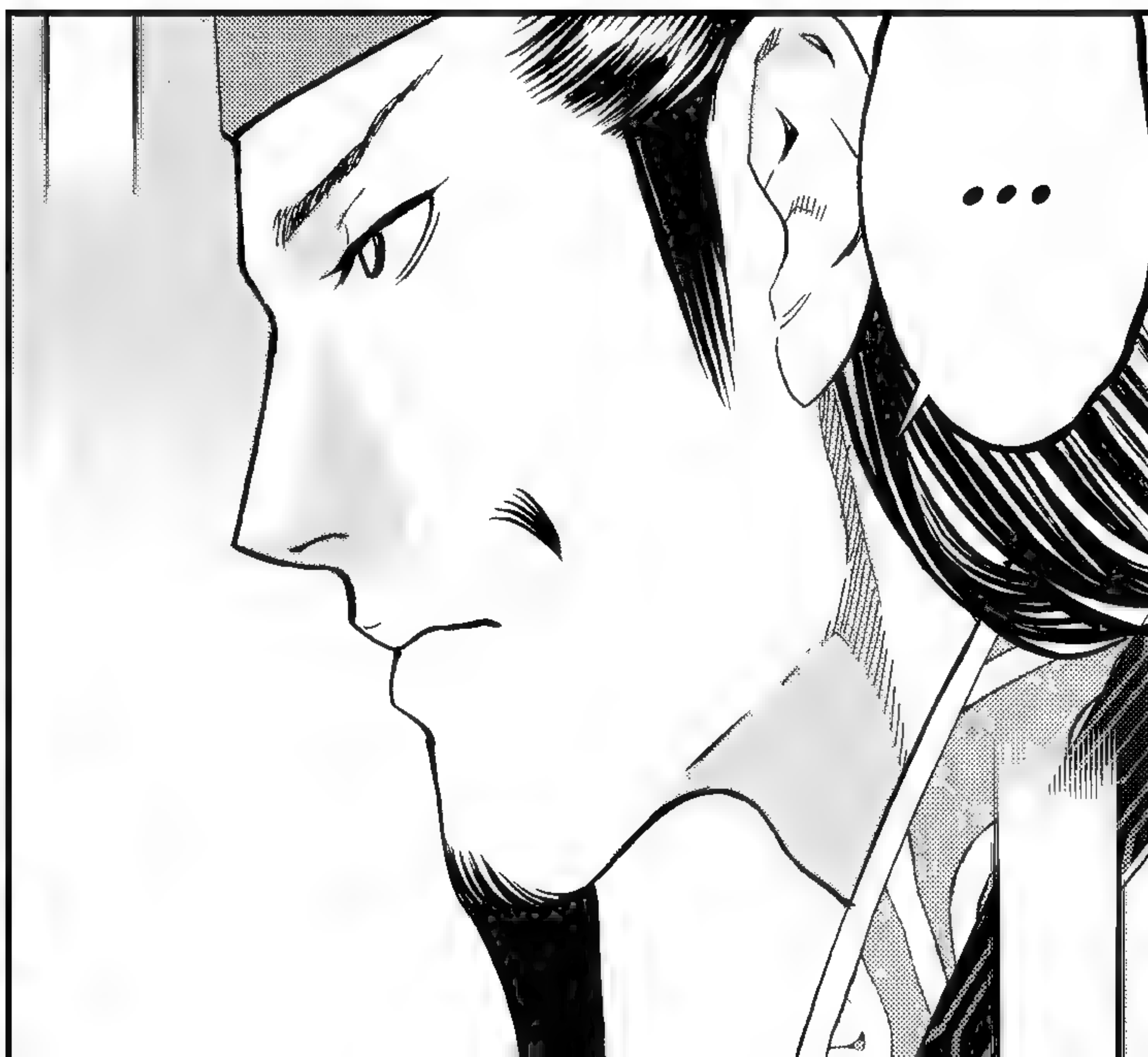










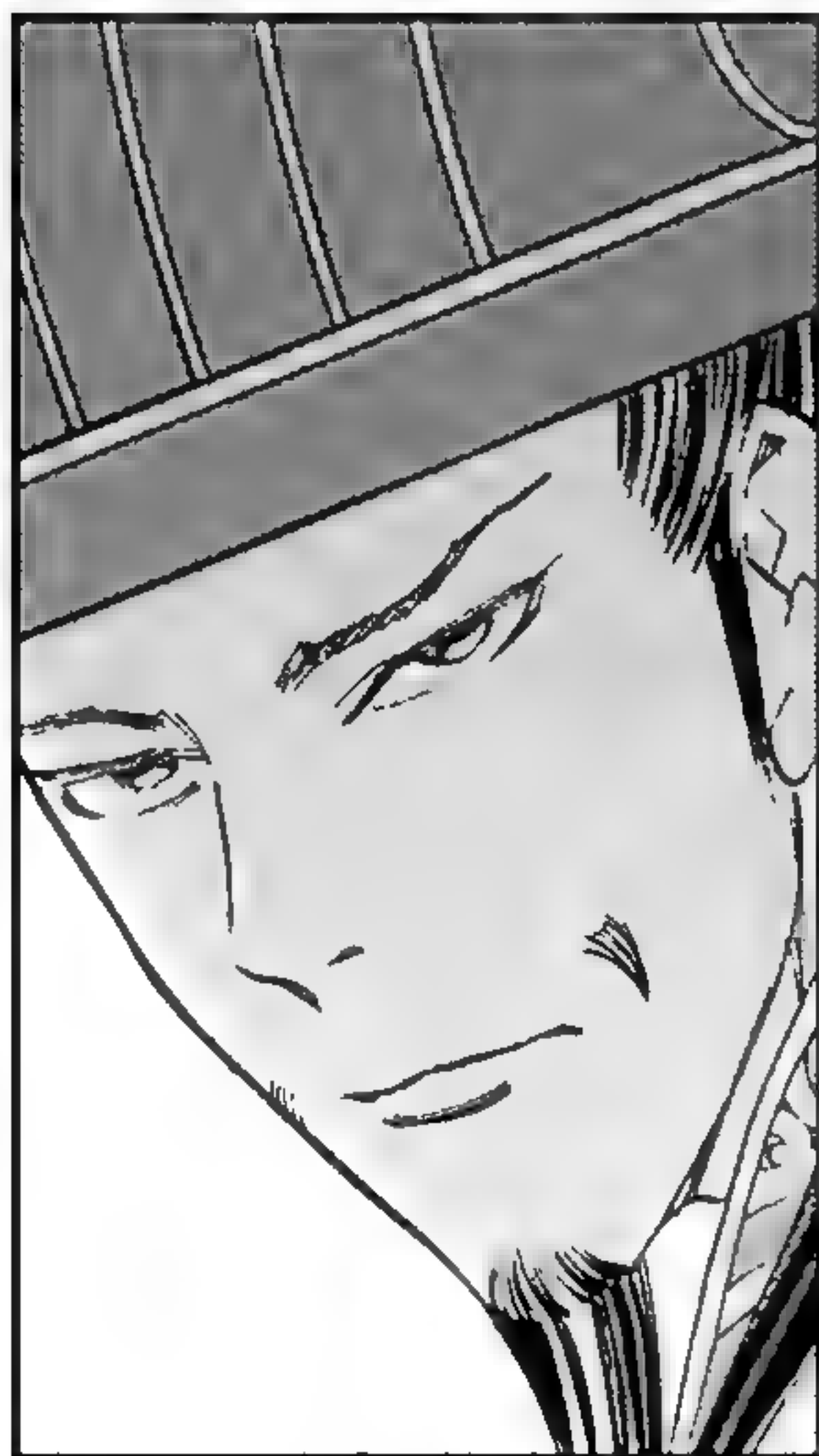
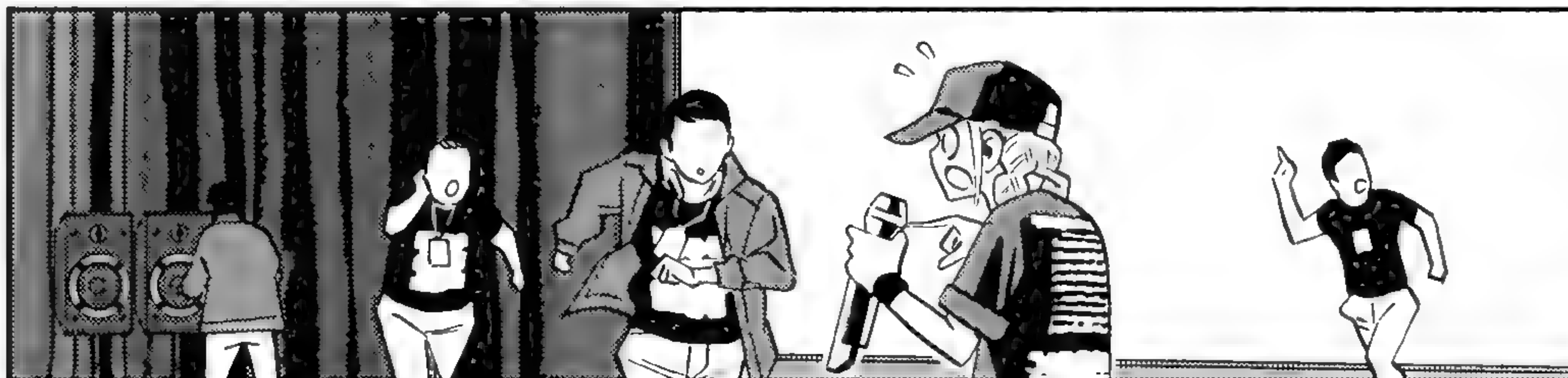




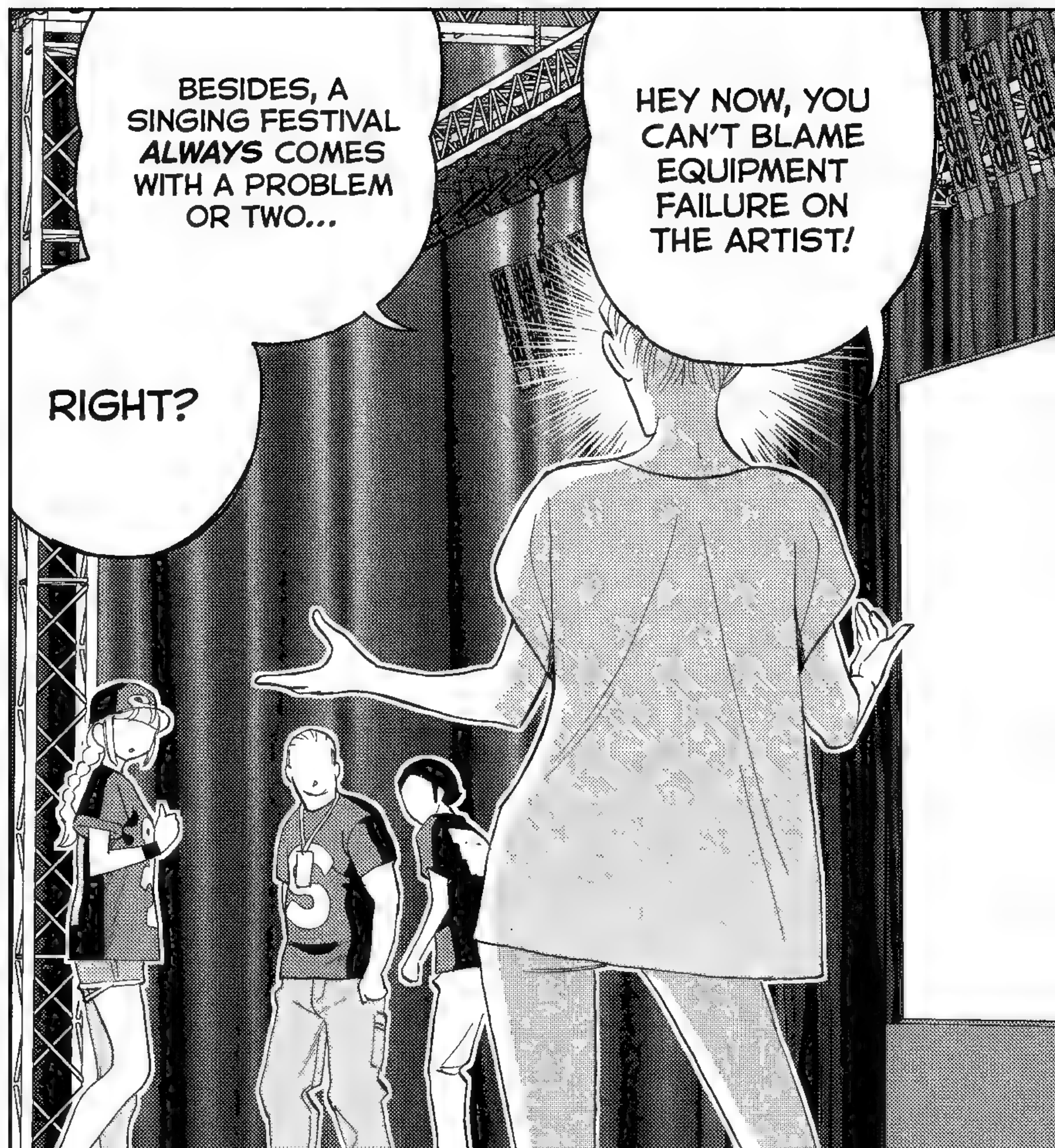
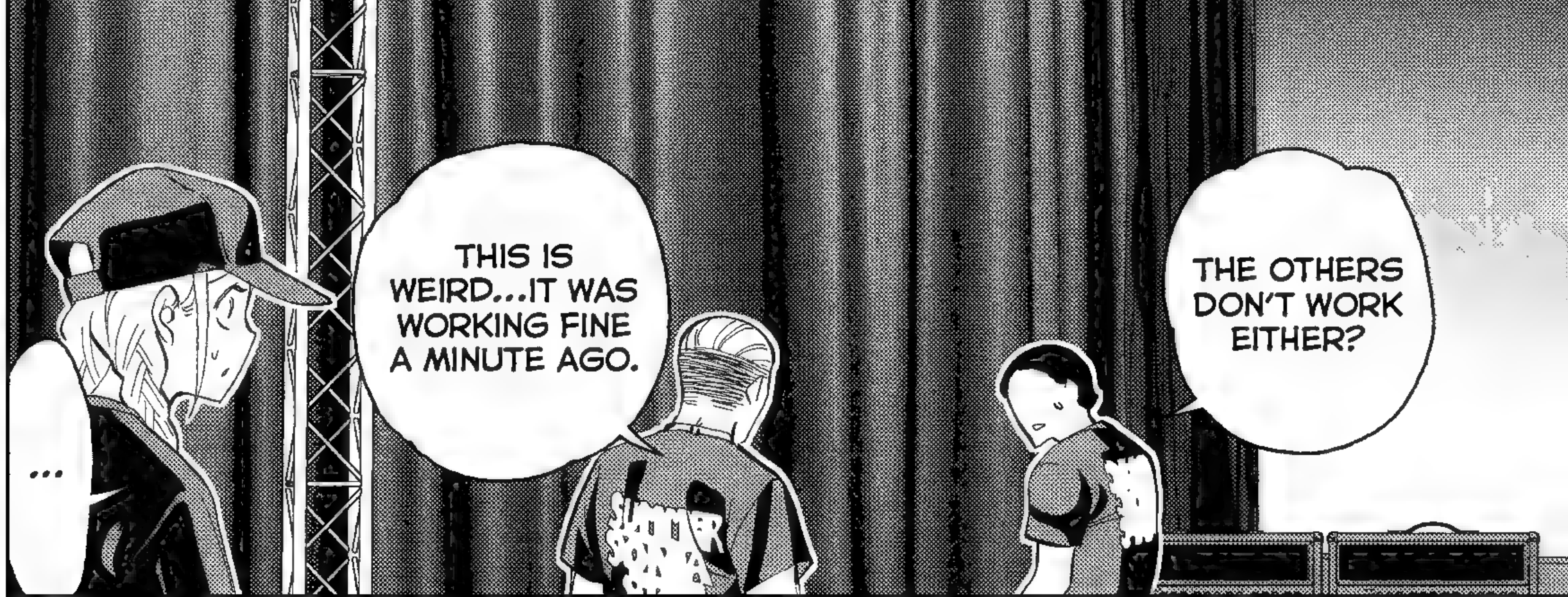
1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!



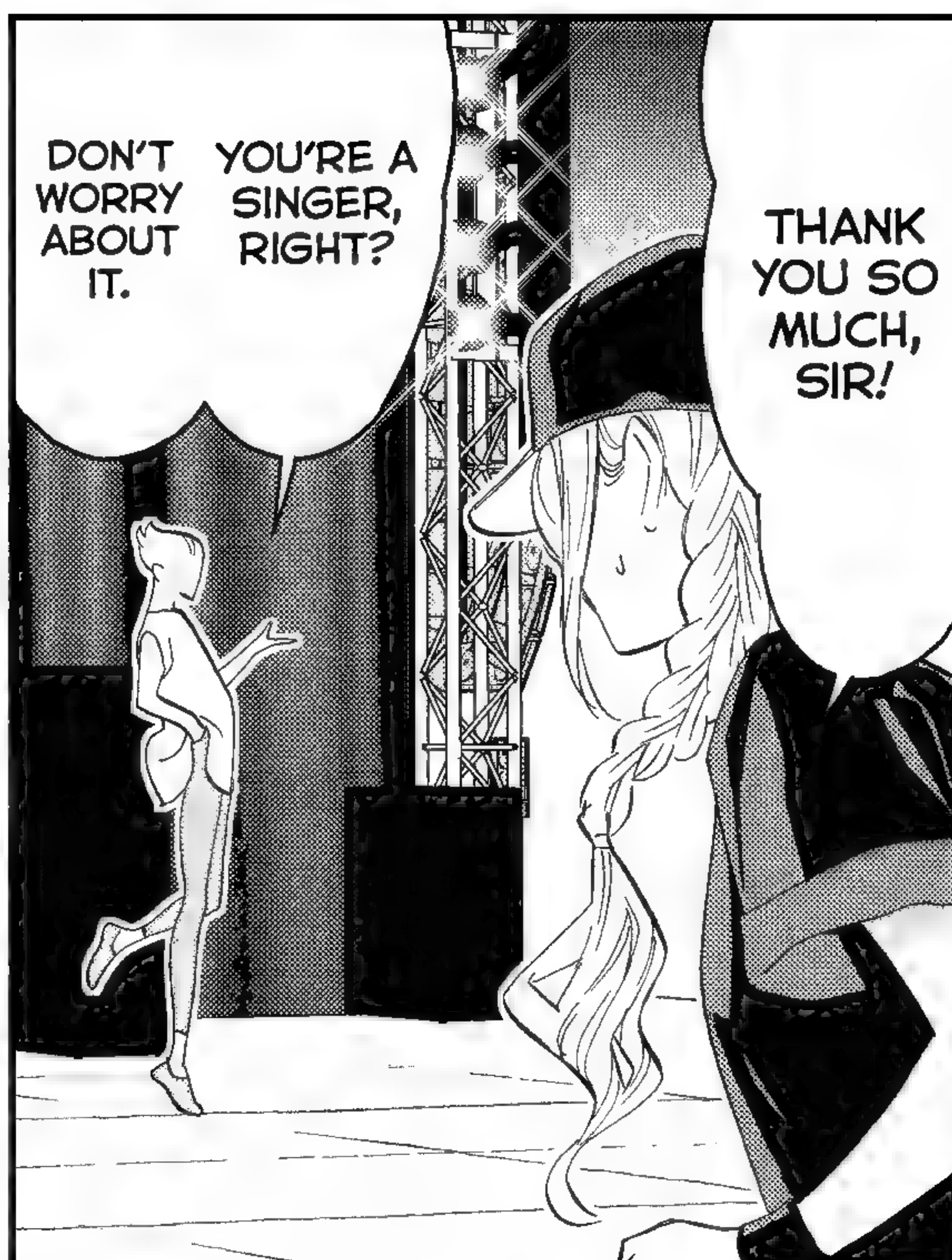
CHAPTER 78 Friendship and Daiginjo Sake















*The  
mics are  
broken!*

*Sorry,  
every-  
oone!*

**KEIJI!**

**IT'S KEIJI  
MAEZONO!**

*I'll dance  
for all  
of you  
instead!*

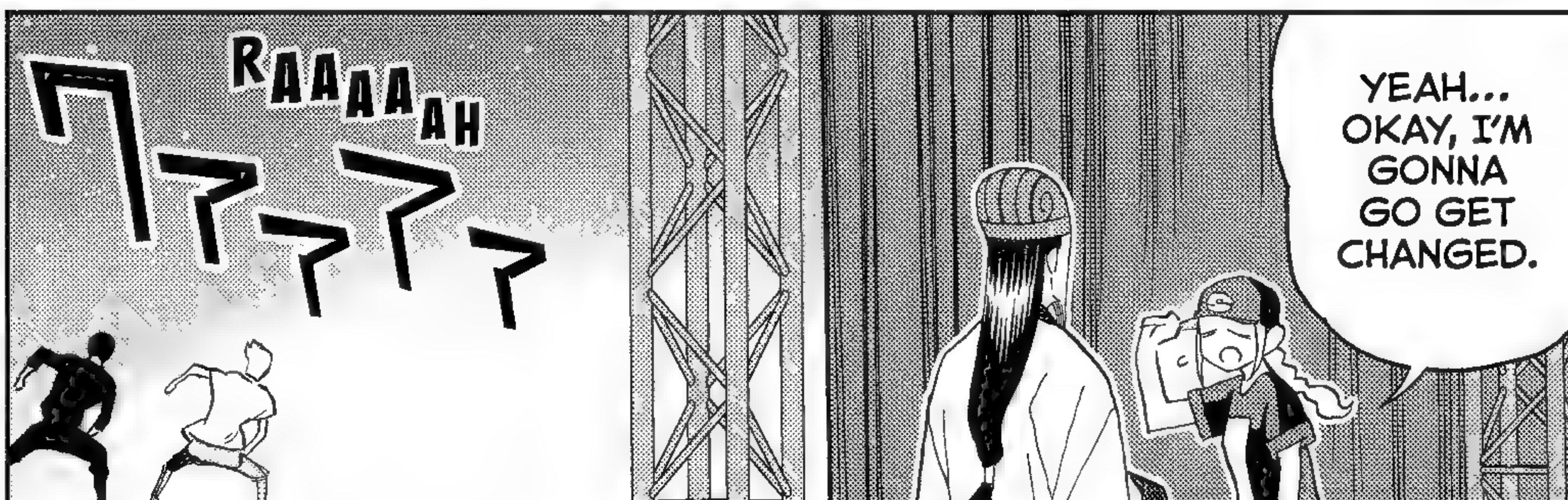
*But hey,  
no sweat!*















SEE YA LATER!



HUH? SHOOT, I'M GOING THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION!



HM?









Noooo!!

Why?!

What?!

IT'S A BRIGHT LIGHT... IT'S A BRIGHT LIGHT... IT'S A BRIGHT LIGHT... IT'S A BRIGHT LIGHT... IT'S A BRIGHT LIGHT...



<WHY CAN'T I GET JAPANESE SAKE AT A JAPANESE FESTIVAL?!>

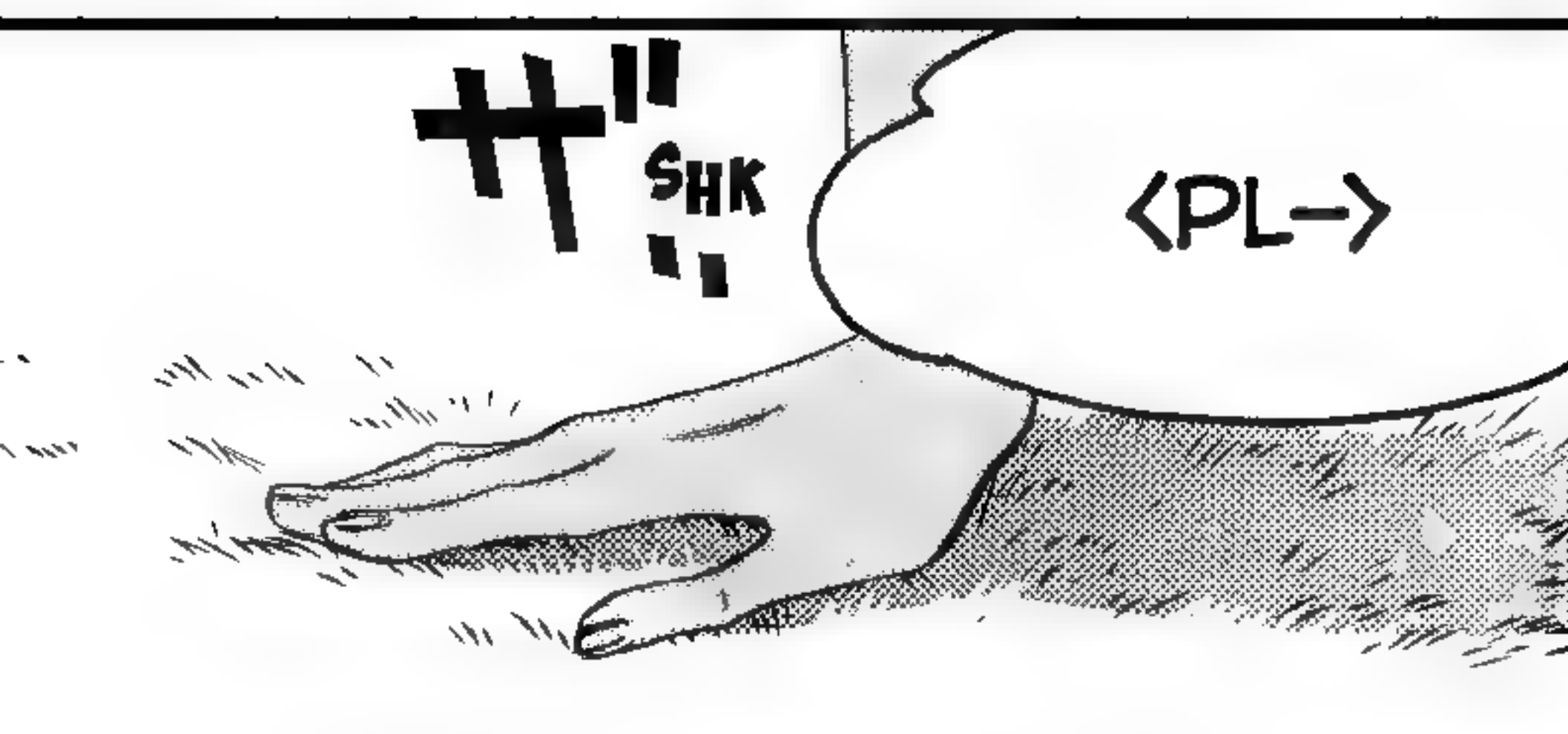
<THIS IS JUST STUPID! HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?!>



<NO... BUT, PLEASE... SAVE ME...>

<I NEED... DAIGINJO...>

WHY DOES SHE WANT SAKE THAT BADLY?



SHK

<PL-→

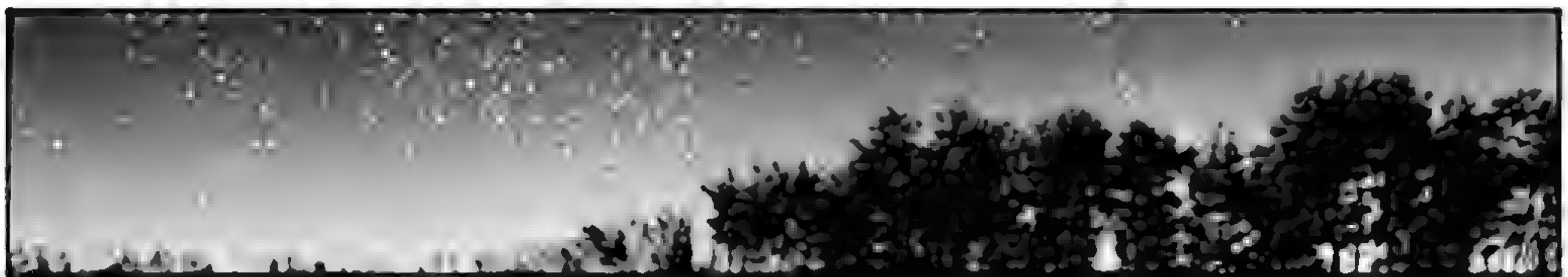


<HEY, YOU! CAN YOU BUY ME SOME SAKE THEN?>

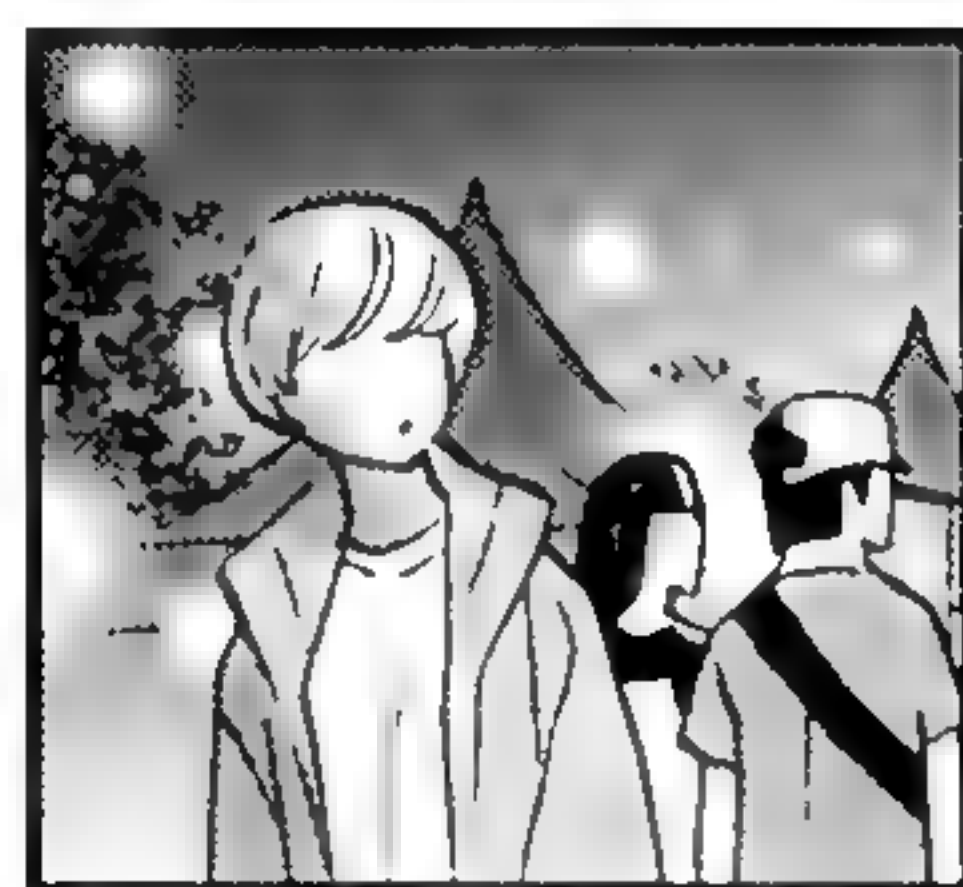
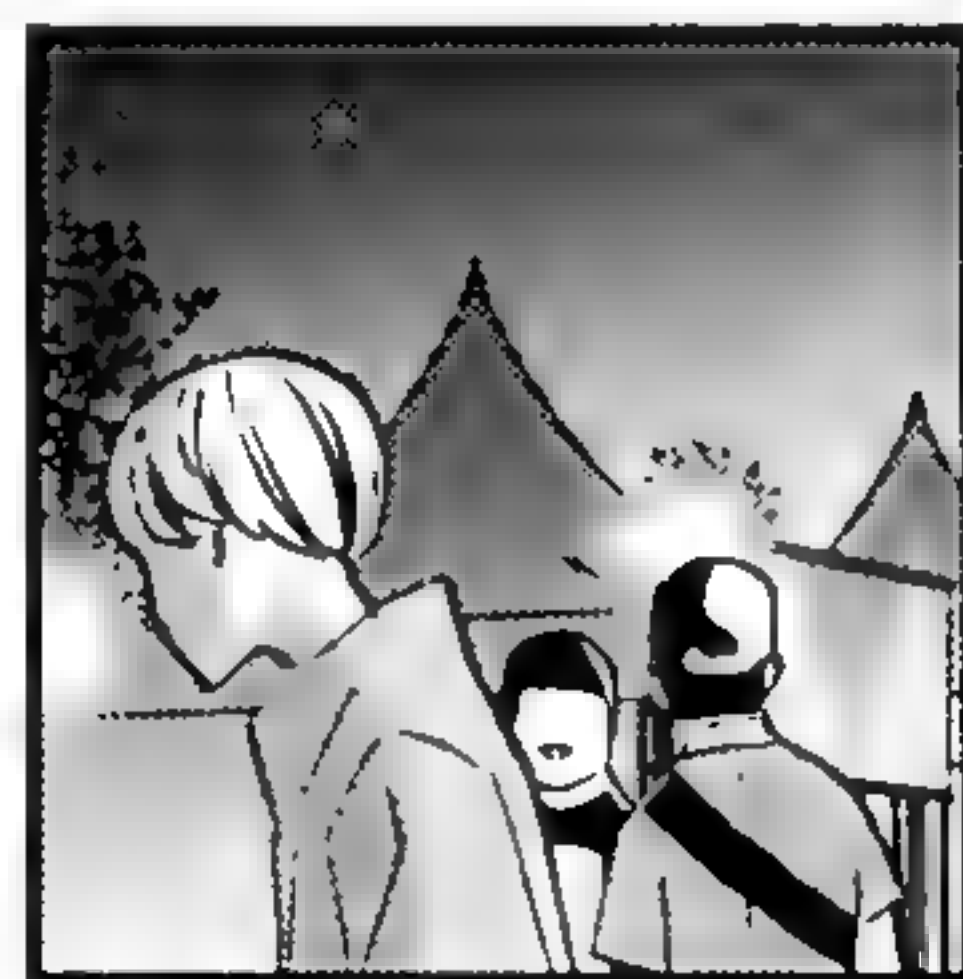
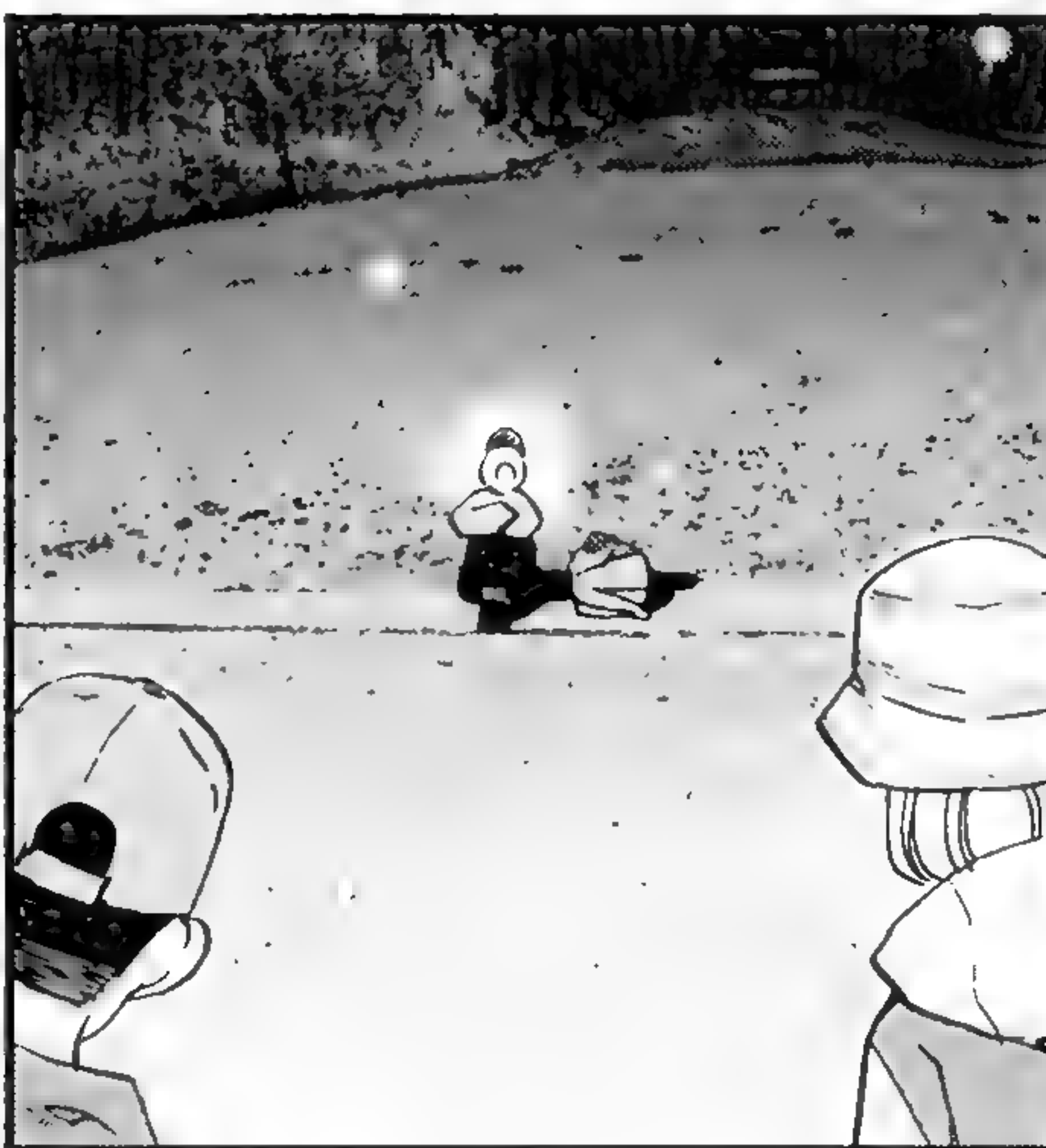
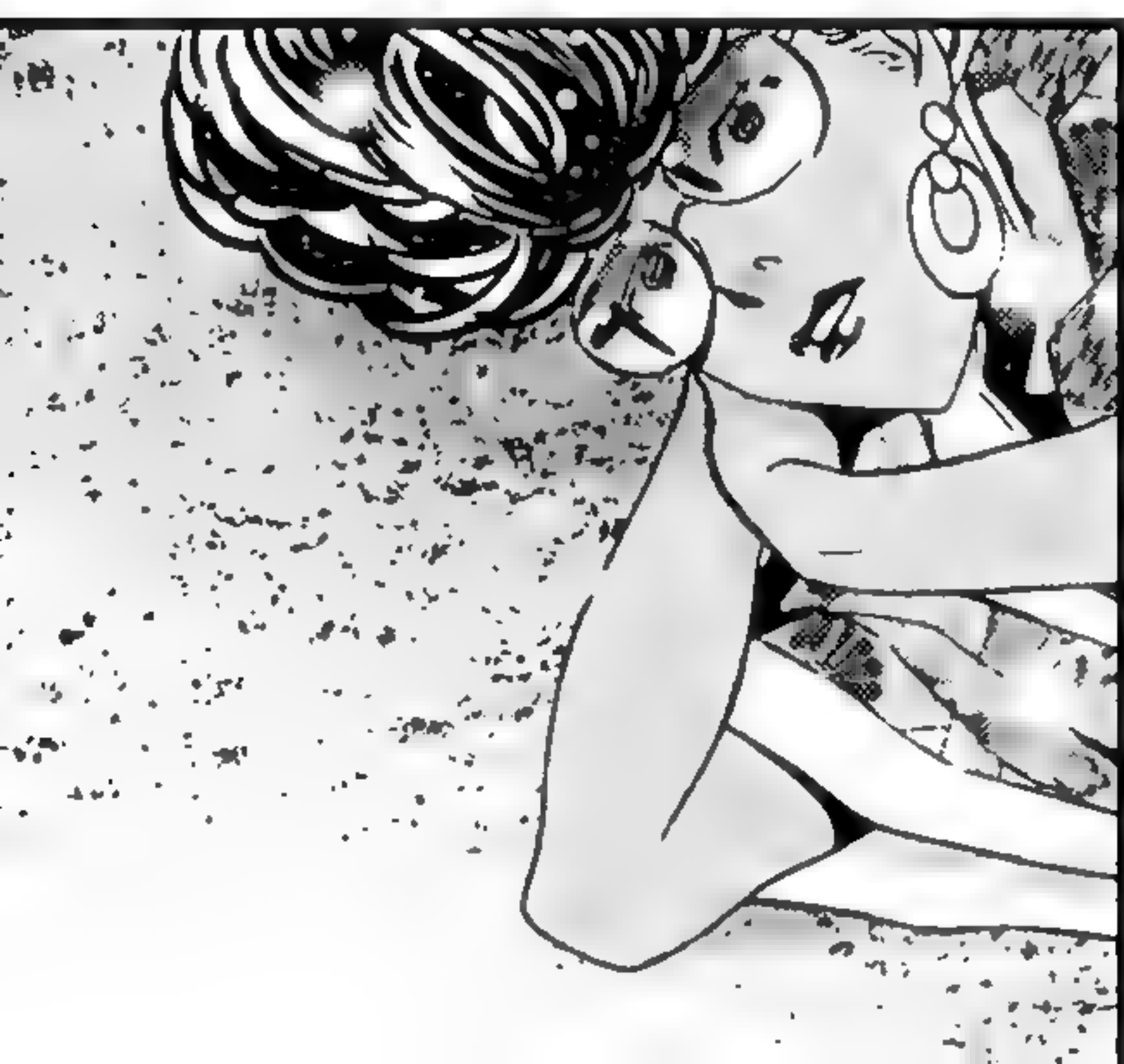
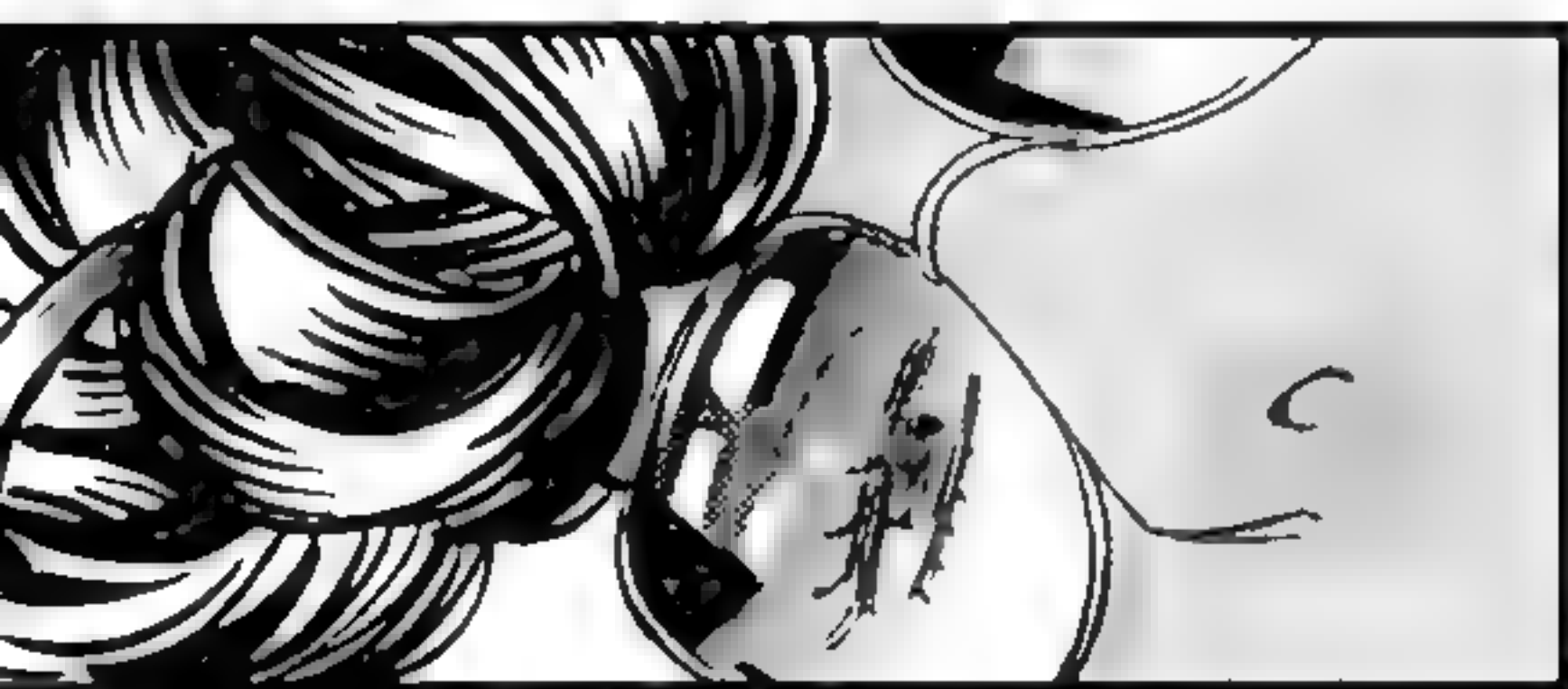
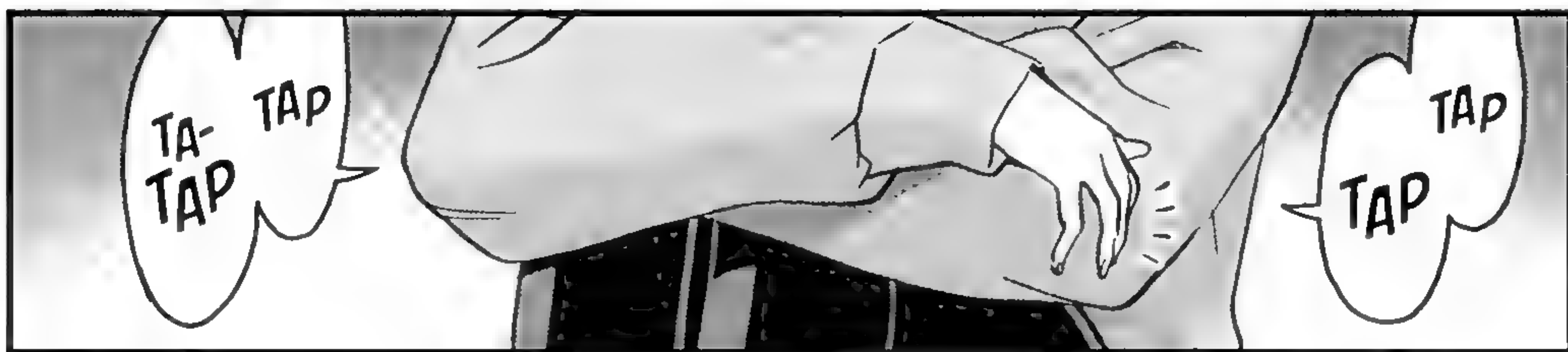
<WILL AMERICAN DOLLARS BE OKAY?>

<UHH, I DON'T THINK YOU CAN USE AMERICAN DOLLARS HERE...>

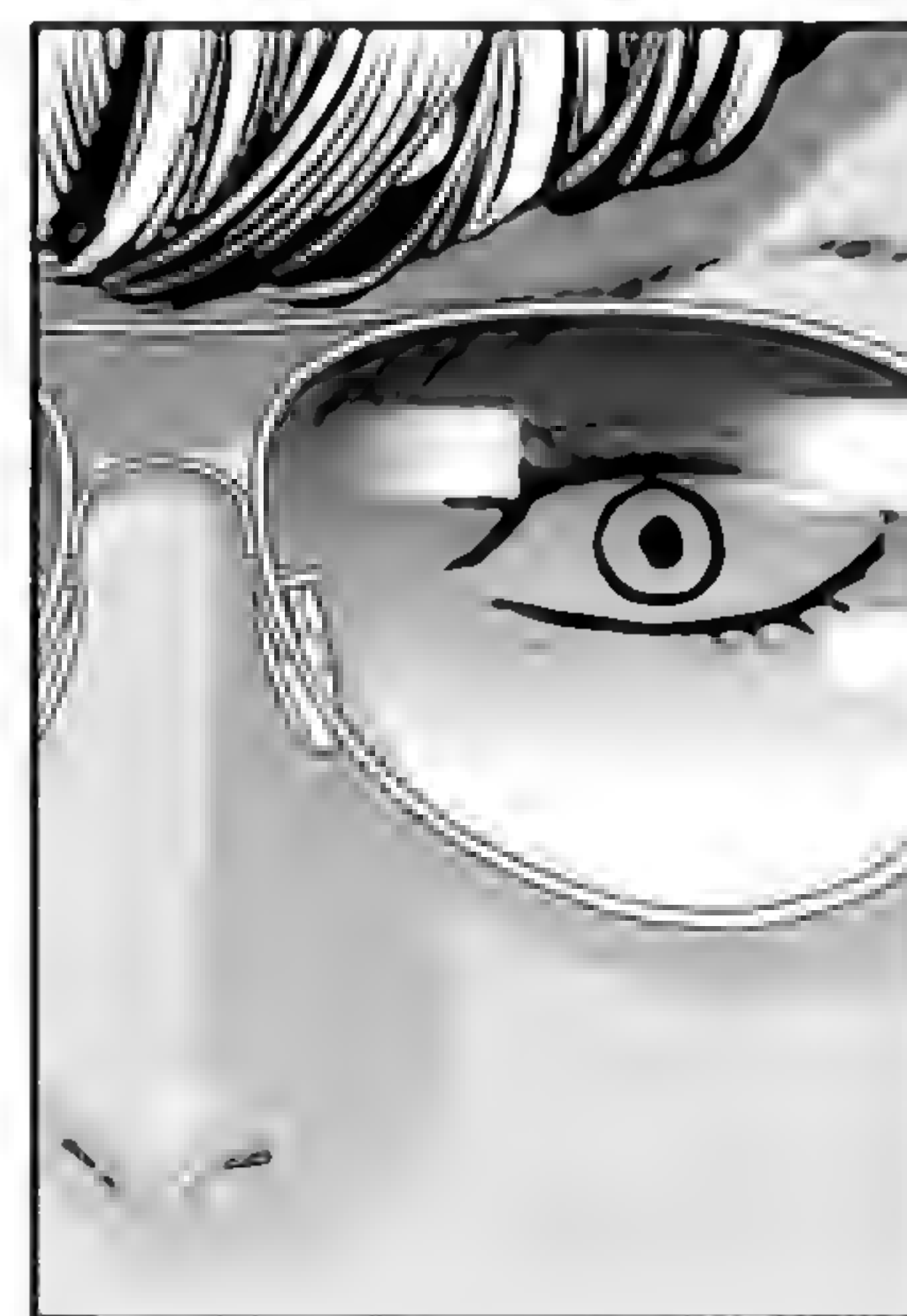




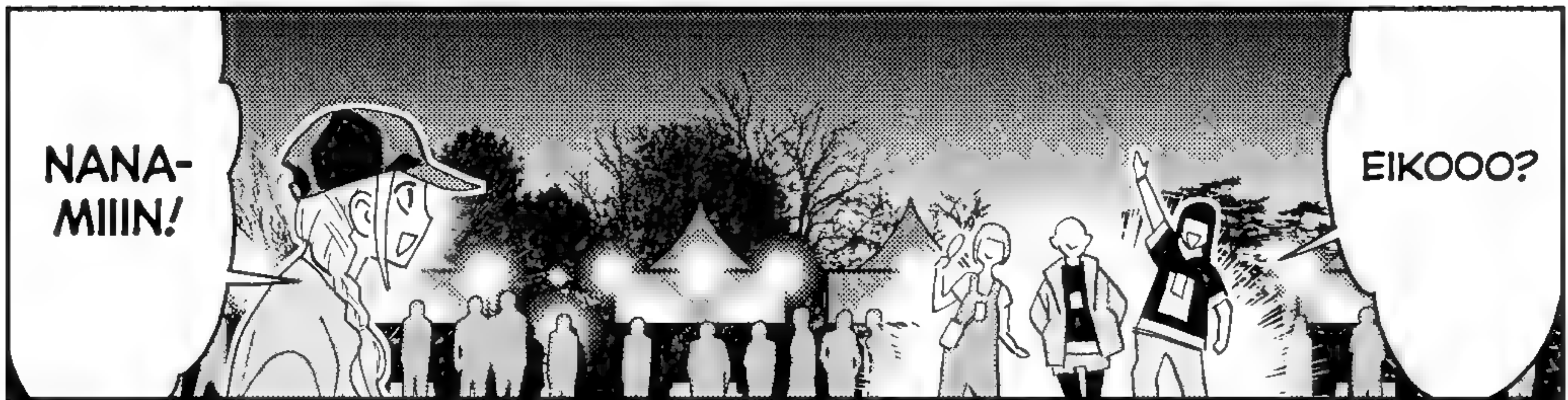




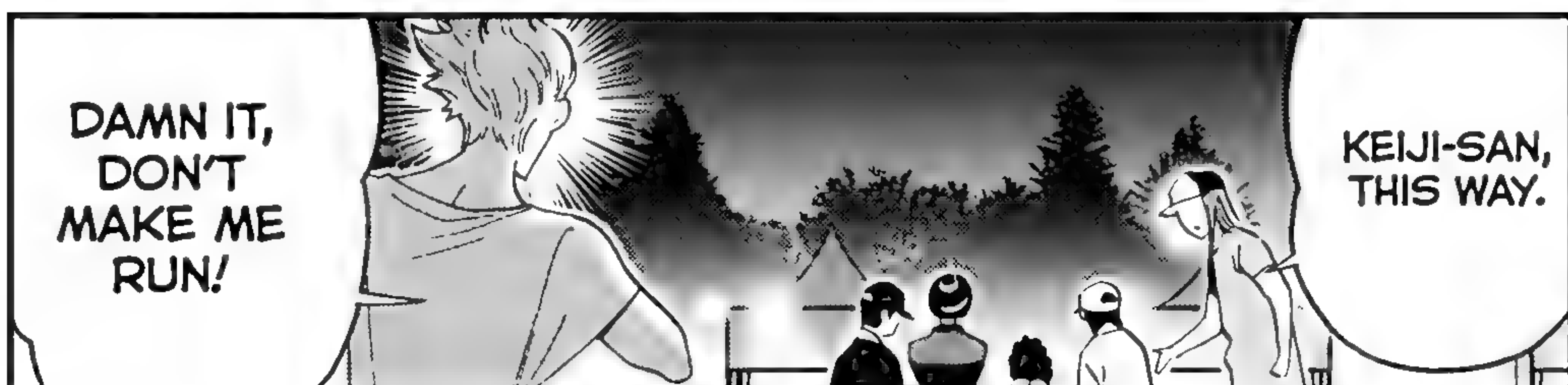




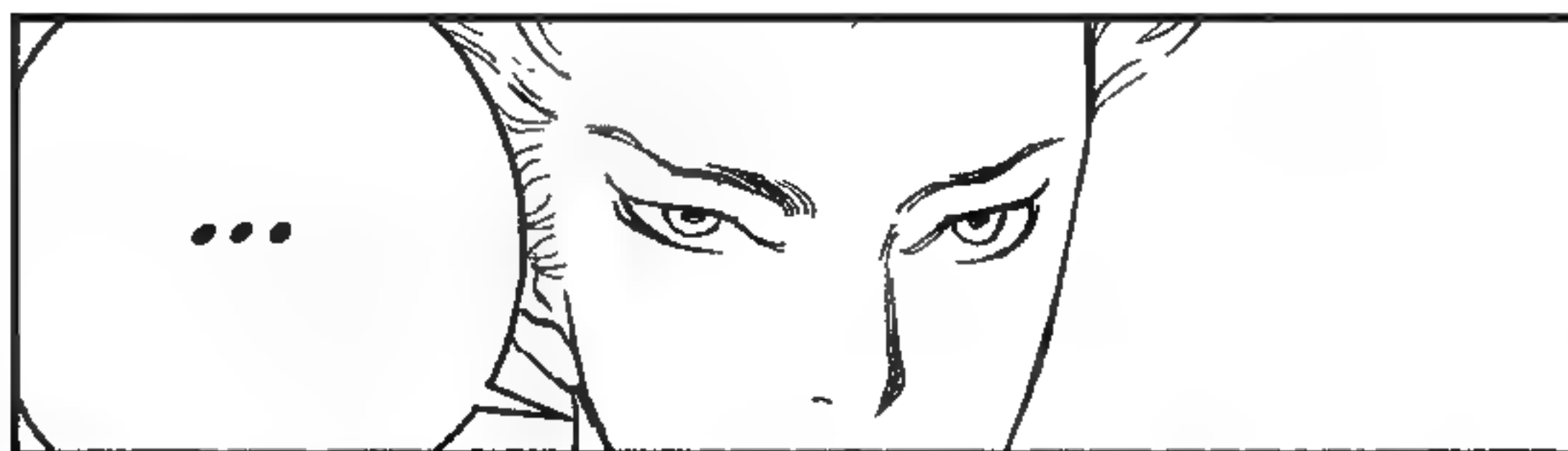














...TAKEN AWAY ALL  
OF HER NOISE...

I SHOULD'VE...



〈THIS IS AN  
ADVANCE  
NOTICE.〉

〈MARIA.〉



〈I'LL BE  
SURE OF IT!〉

〈KNOW THAT YOU WILL  
DEFINITELY BE THERE  
FOR MY STAGE!〉



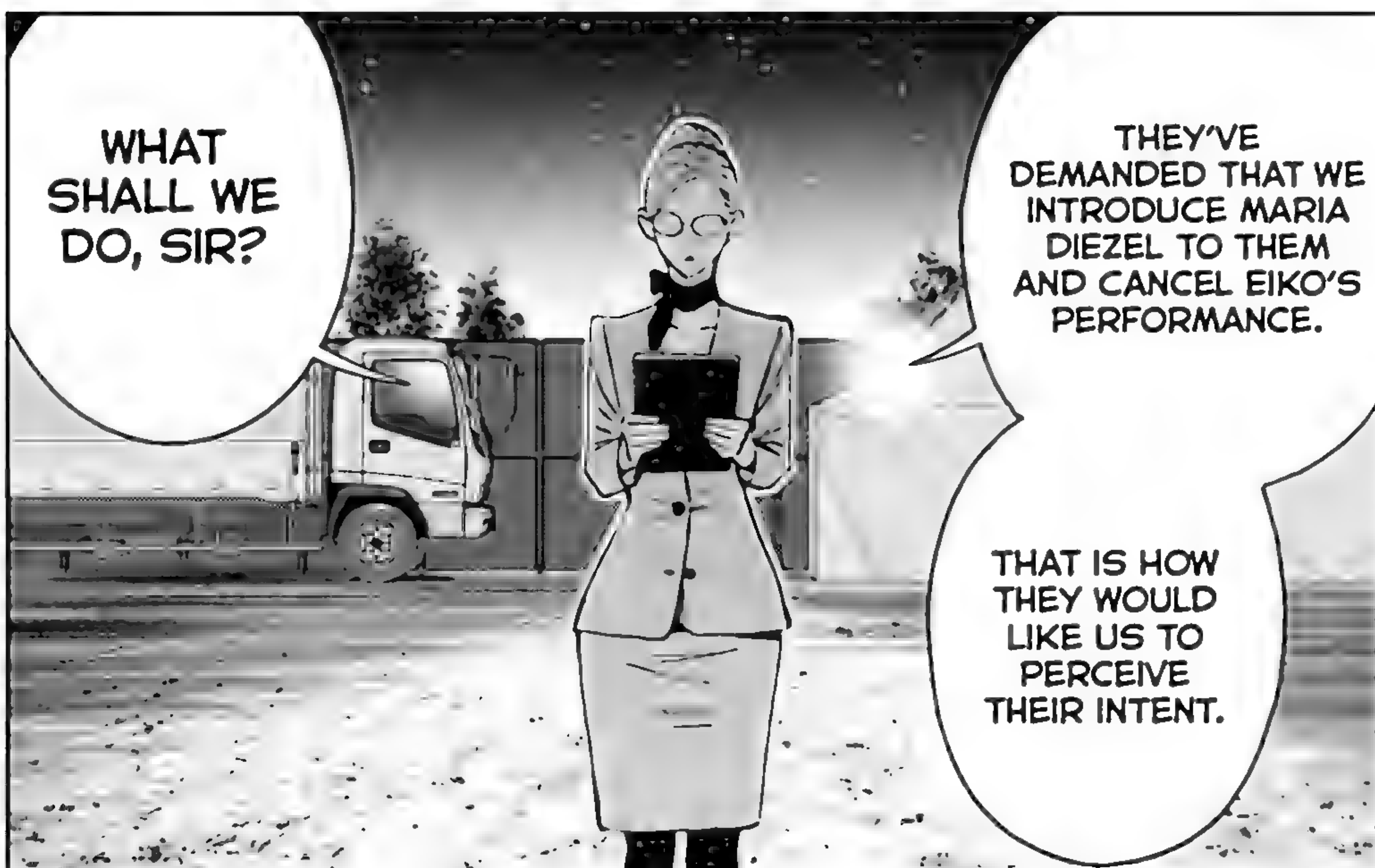
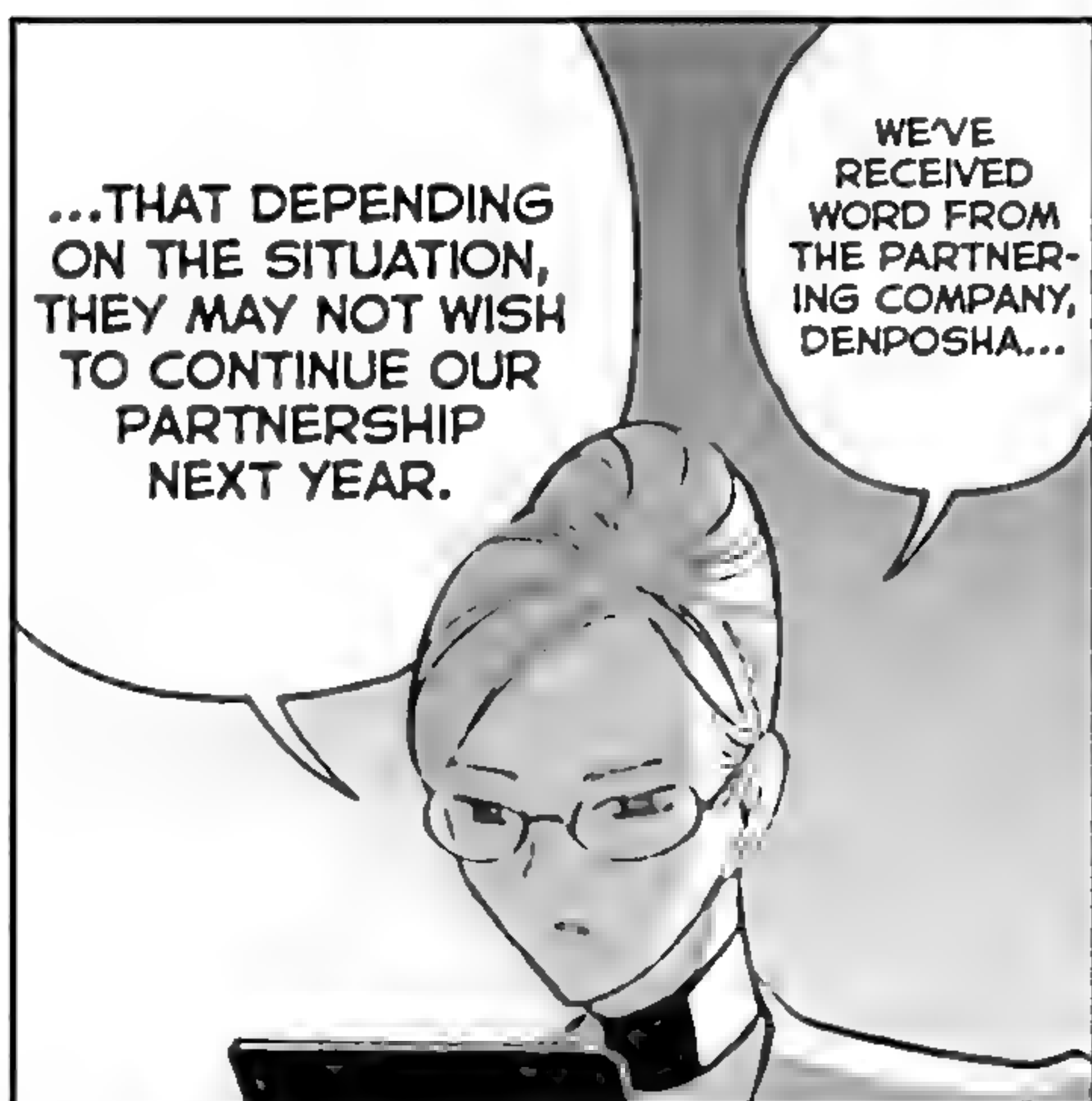


1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!

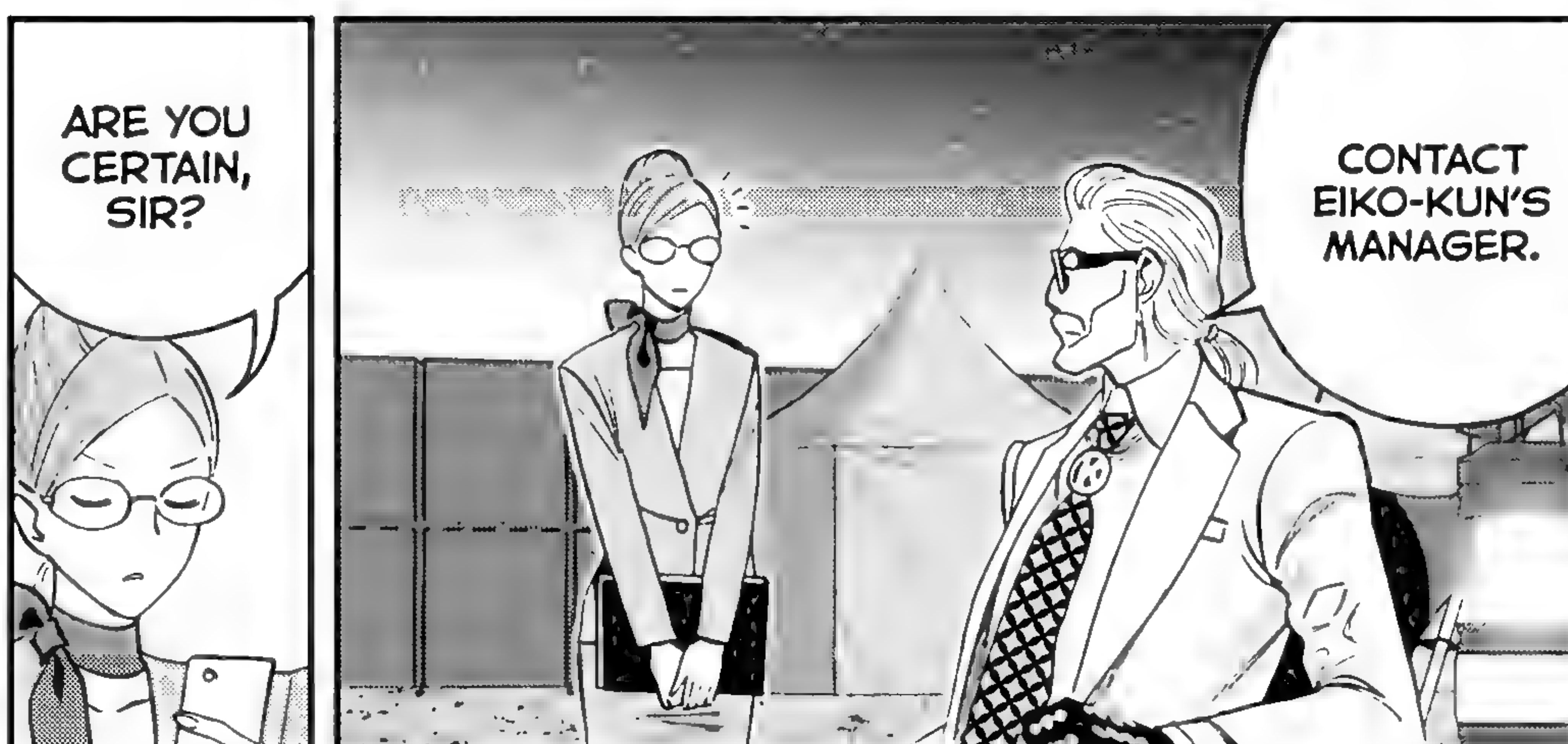
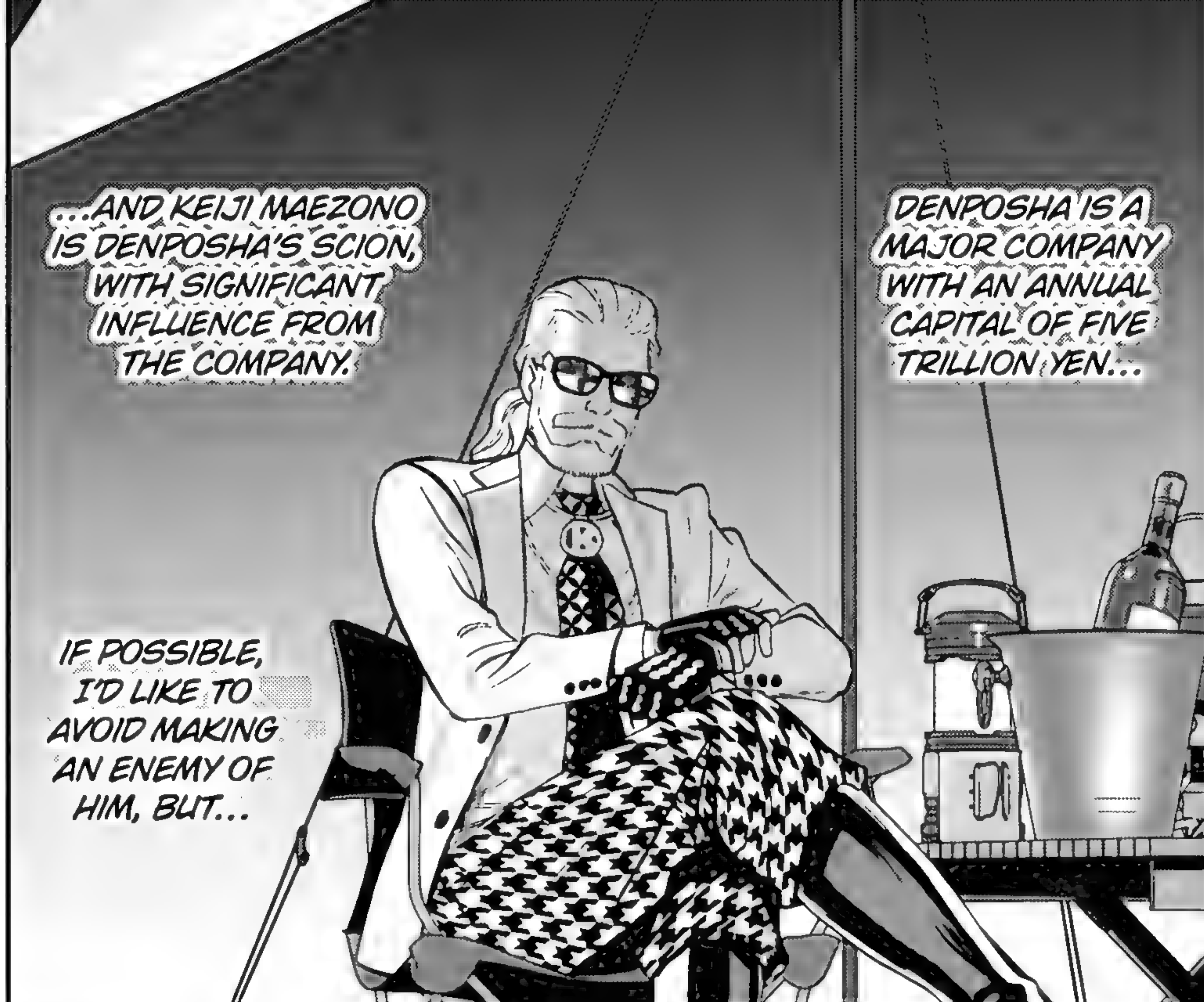




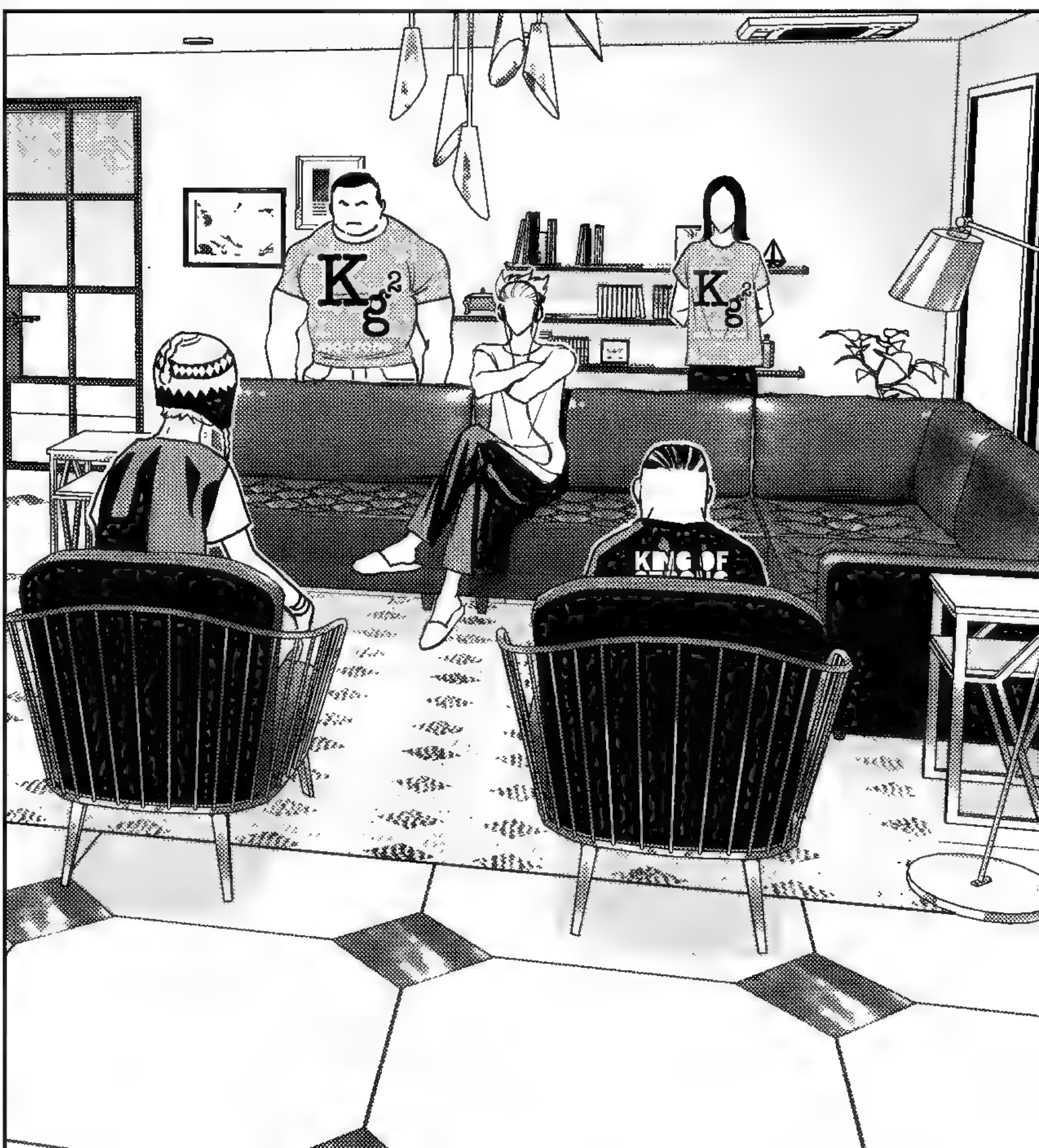
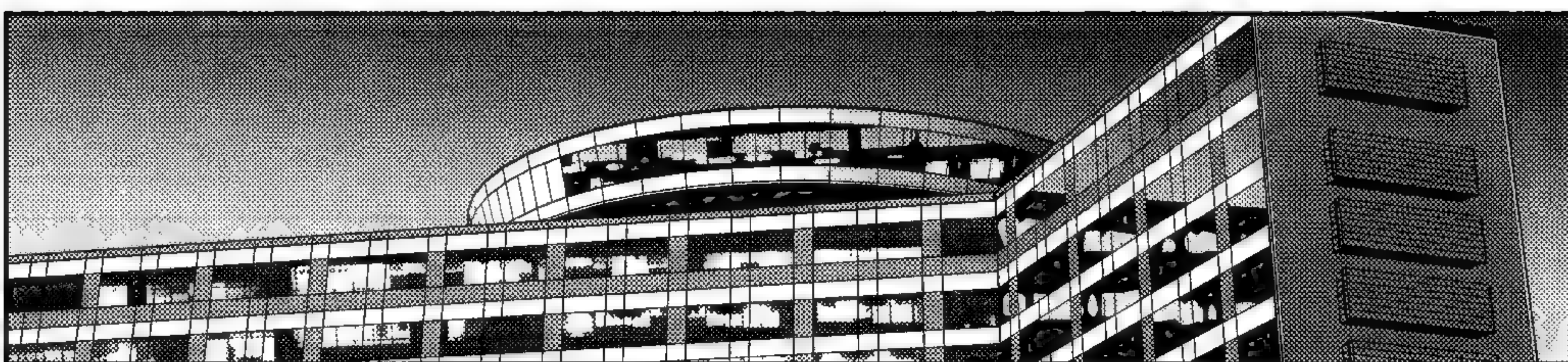
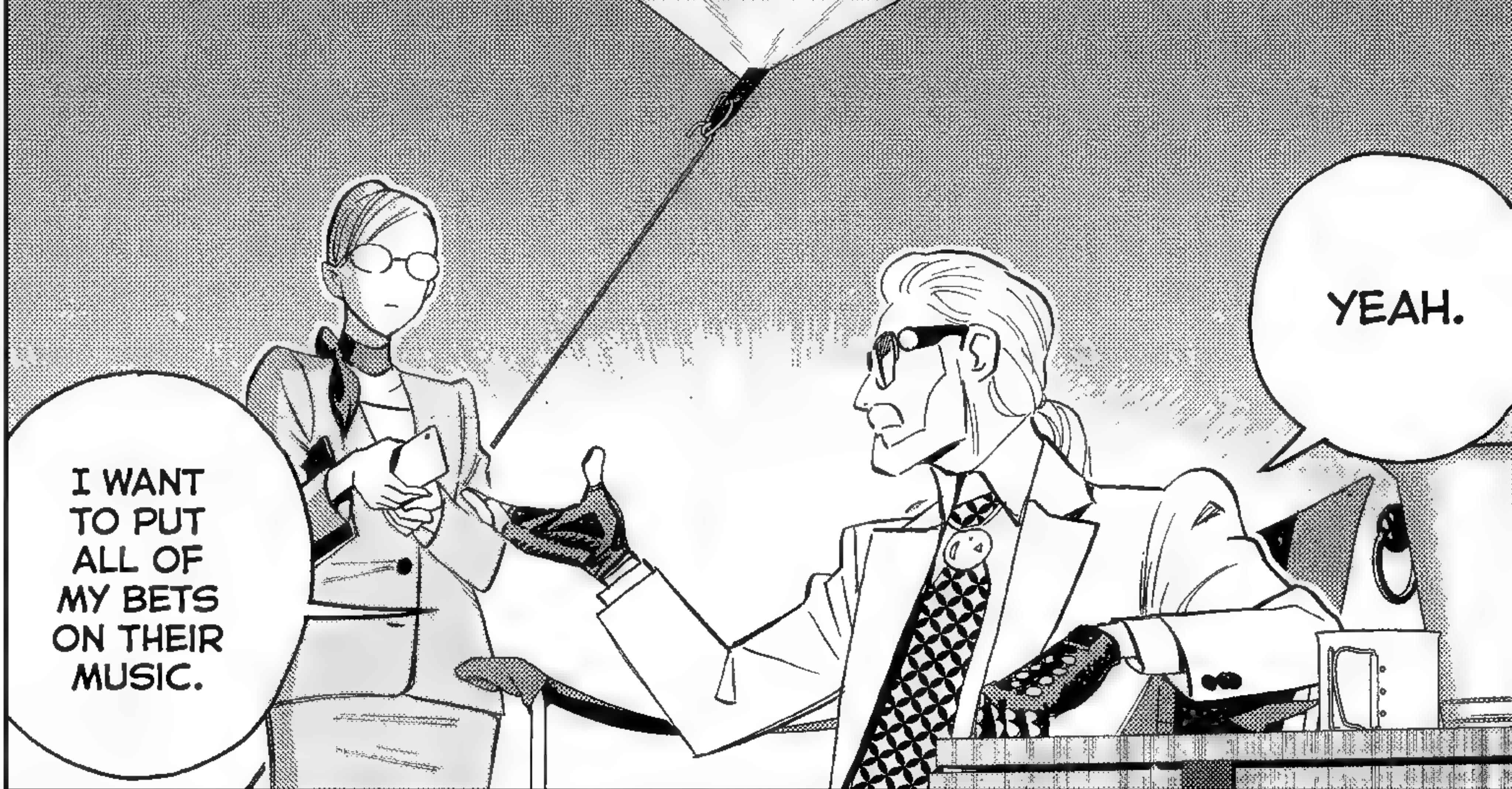




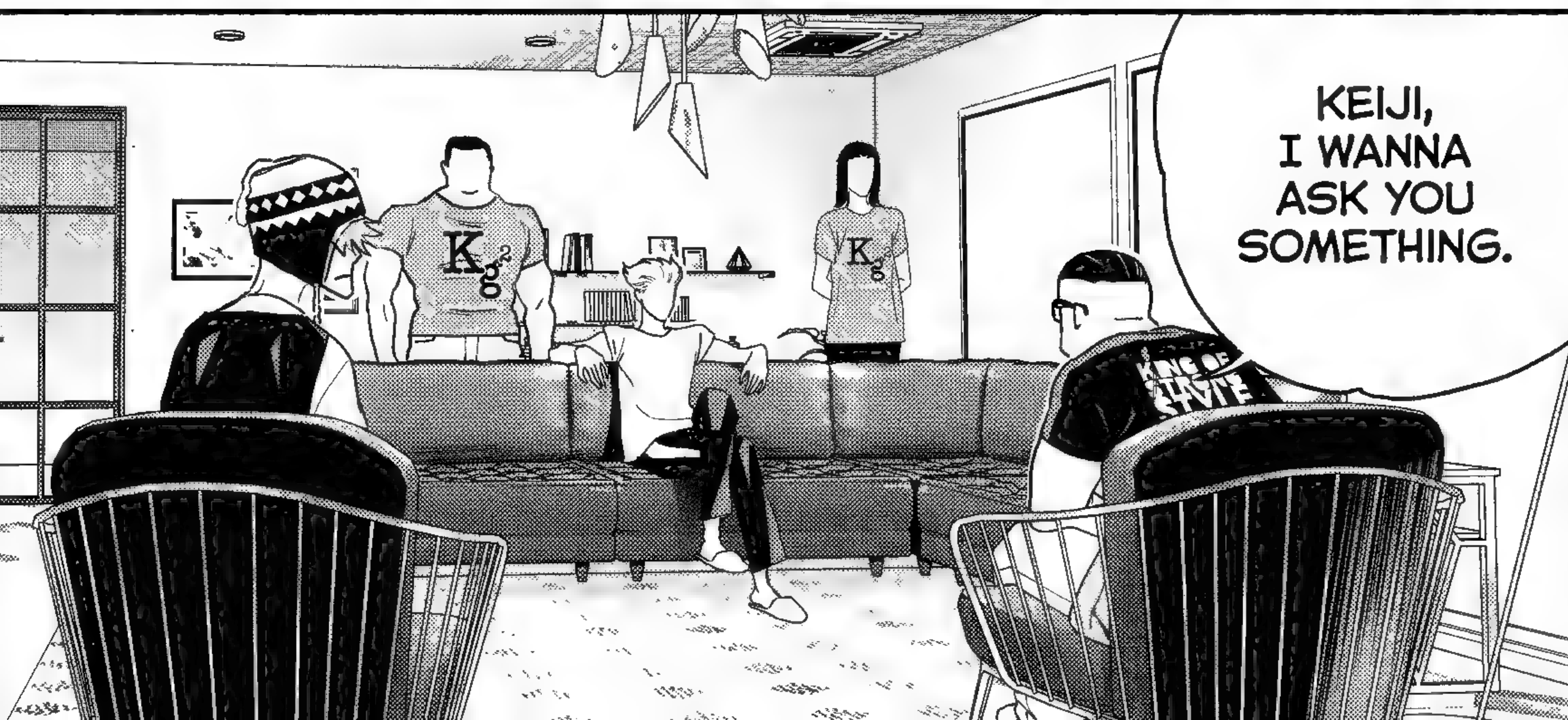
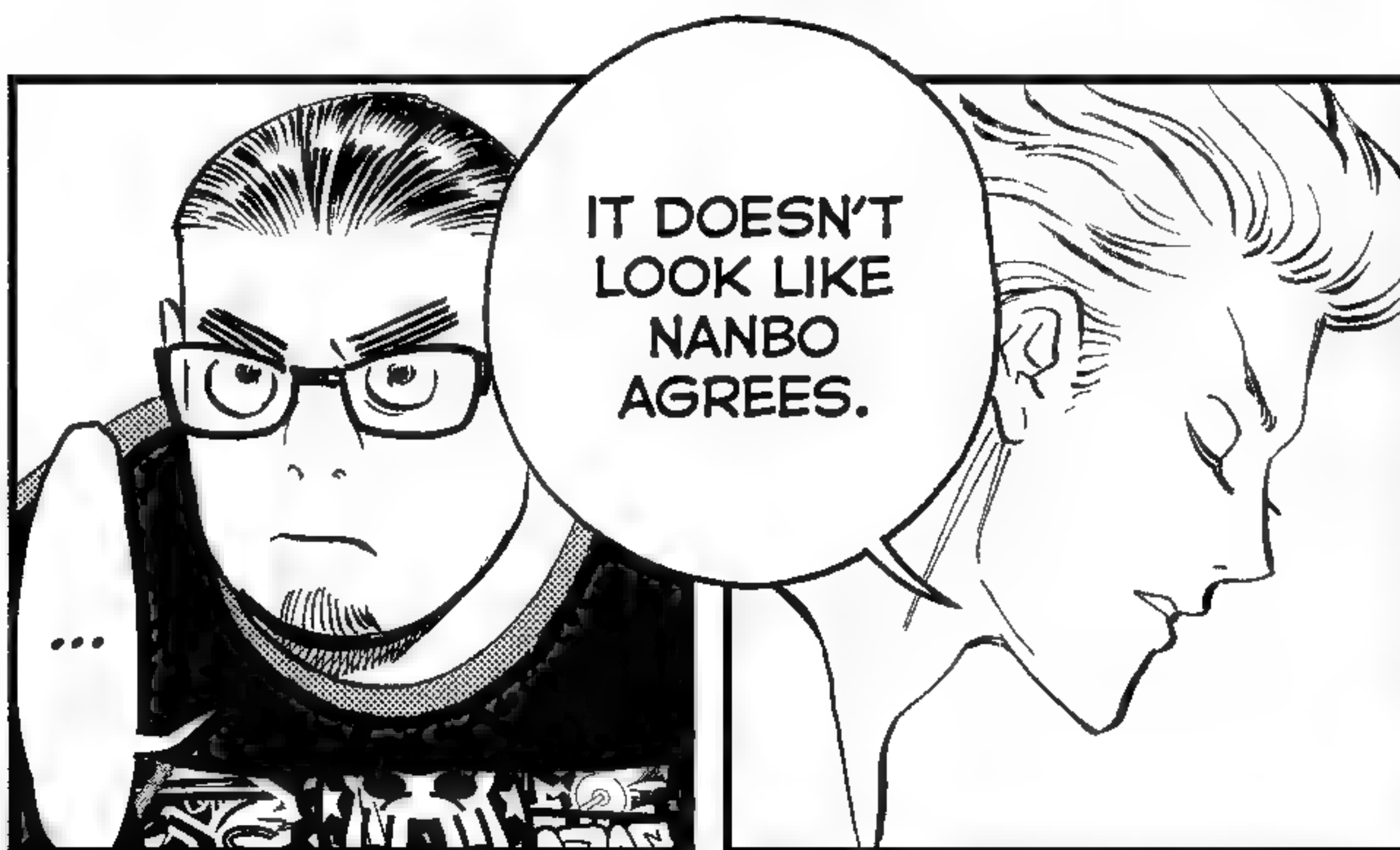
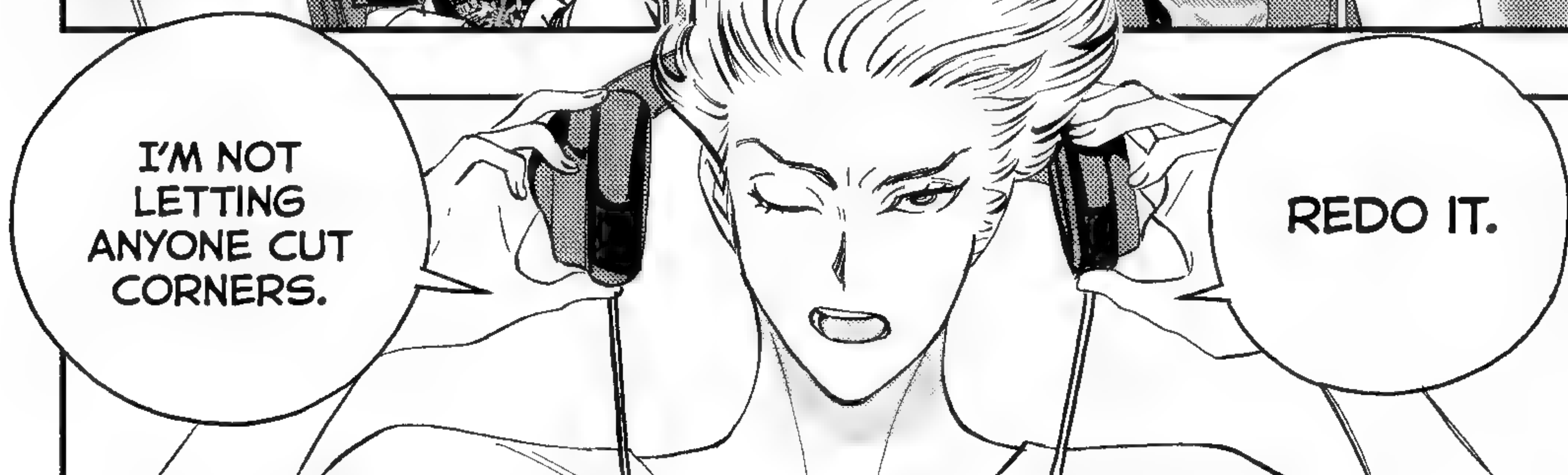




















HOW  
LONG DO  
WE HAVE  
TO KEEP  
BEING  
YOUR  
GHOST-  
WRITERS  
?!

WE'VE  
GIVEN  
YOU  
ENOUGH!!

WE SHOULD  
BE ABLE TO  
MAKE MUSIC  
TOGETHER,  
AS A GROUP  
OF THREE!



YOU DO  
KNOW HOW  
A CONTRACT  
WORKS,  
RIGHT?



ONCE SIGNED,  
YOU HAVE TO  
PAY PENALTIES  
TO CANCEL THE  
CONTRACT.

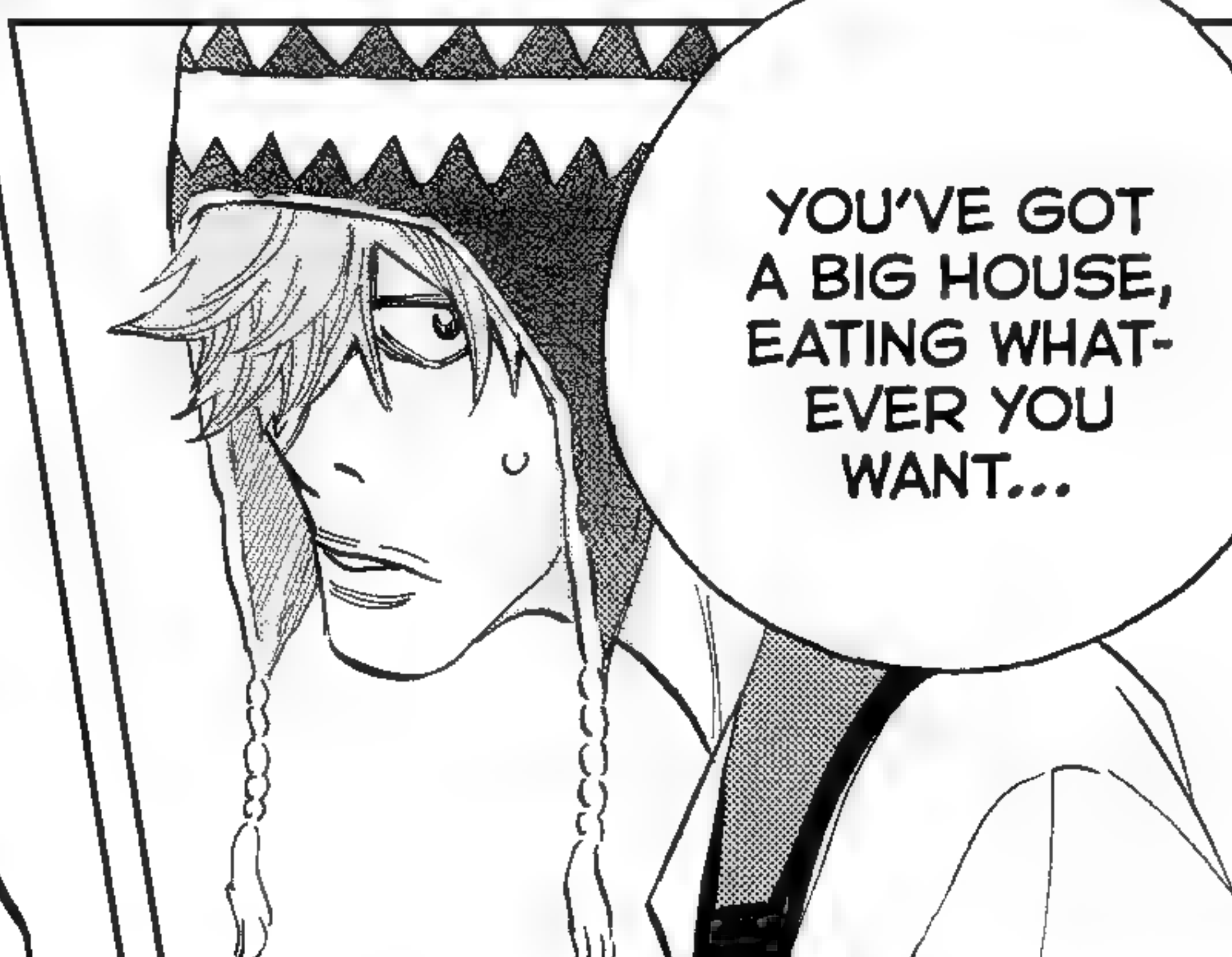




HIGASHIYAMA,  
NANBO, YOU BOTH  
CAN ONLY LIVE  
YOUR LUXURIOUS  
LIVES BECAUSE  
OF *ME*, RIGHT?



...MAKING MUSIC  
HOWEVER YOU  
WANT, AND YOU  
CAN EVEN TAKE  
TIME OFF WORK  
WHENEVER YOU  
WANT.



YOU'VE GOT  
A BIG HOUSE,  
EATING WHAT-  
EVER YOU  
WANT...

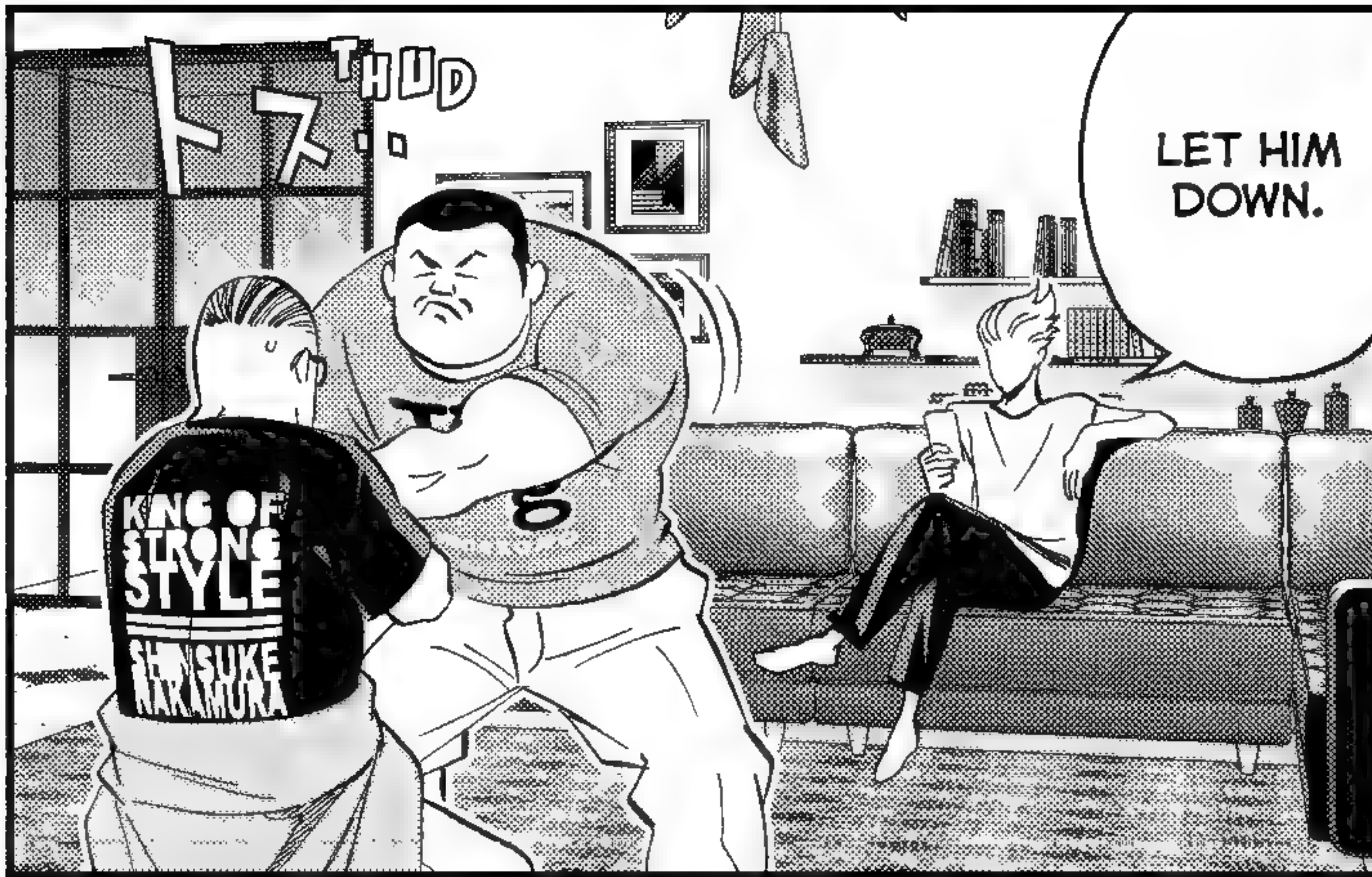


OR WHAT, DO  
YOU WANT  
TO GO BACK  
TO MAKING  
950 YEN AN  
HOUR AT A  
CONVENIENCE  
STORE?\*

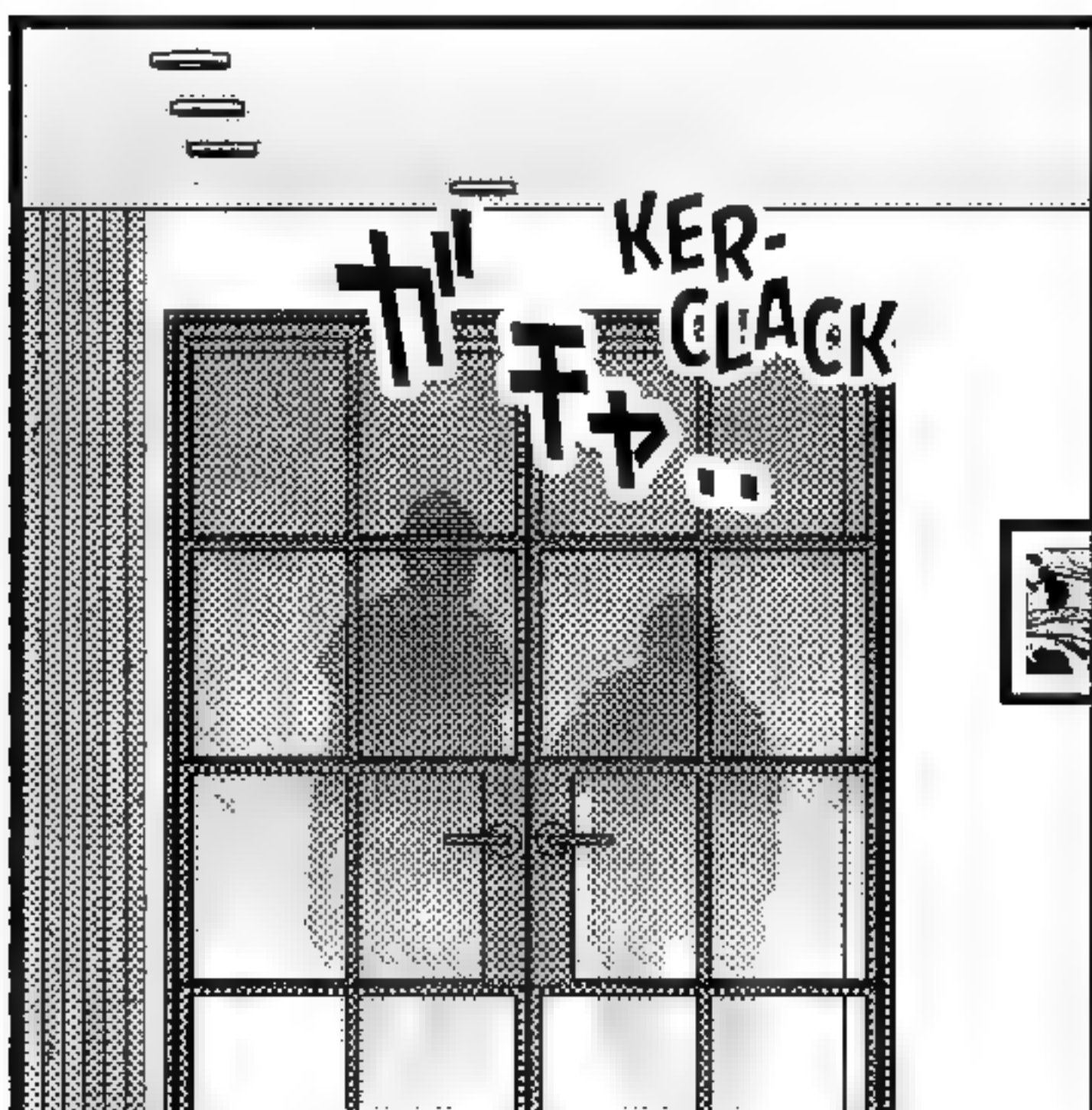
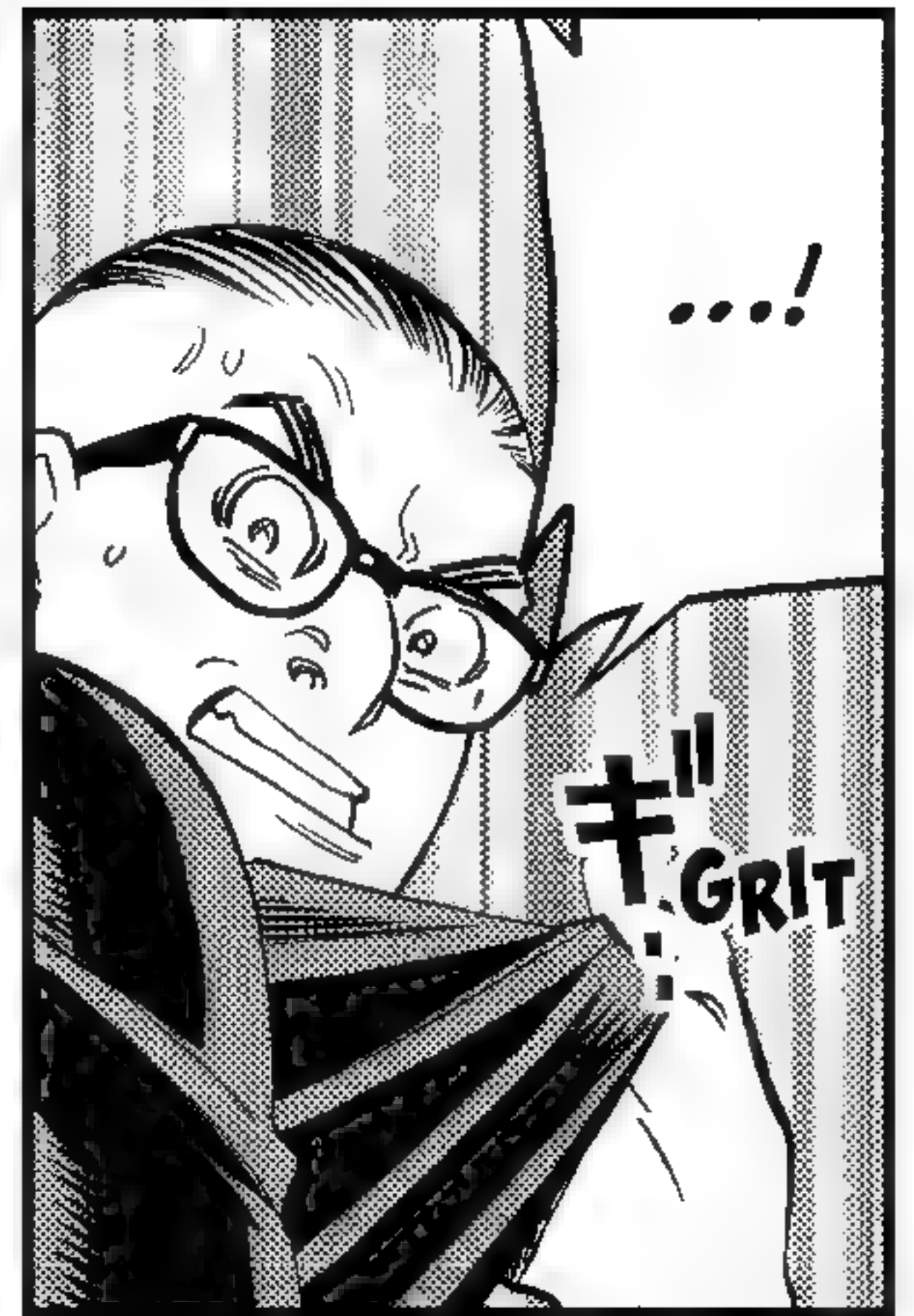
NEITHER  
OF YOU COULD  
MAKE SO MUCH  
OF YOURSELVES  
IF I'D NEVER  
BOUGHT YOUR  
MUSIC.

\*1 DOLLAR IS  
APPROXIMATELY  
100 YEN.

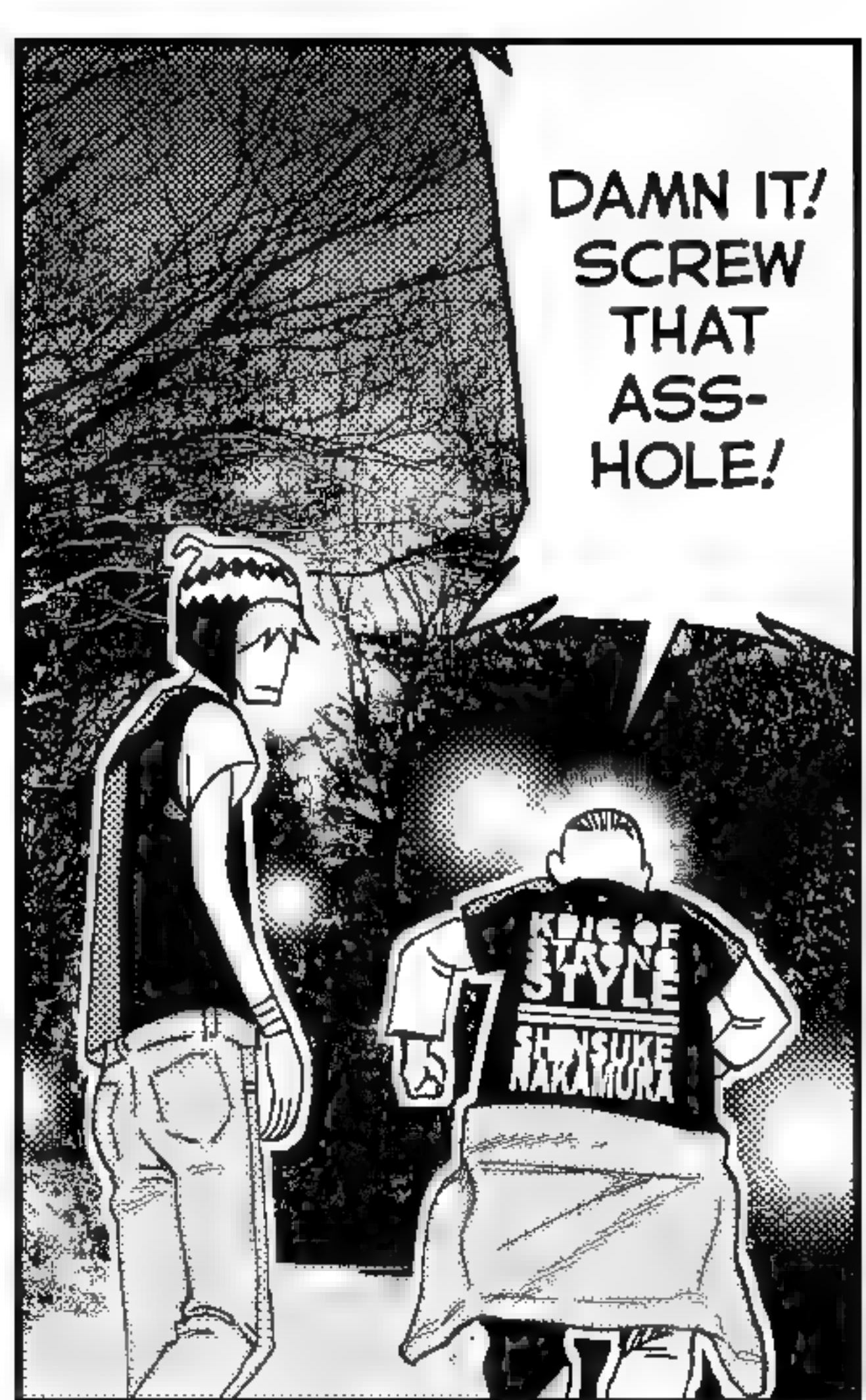




LET HIM  
DOWN.









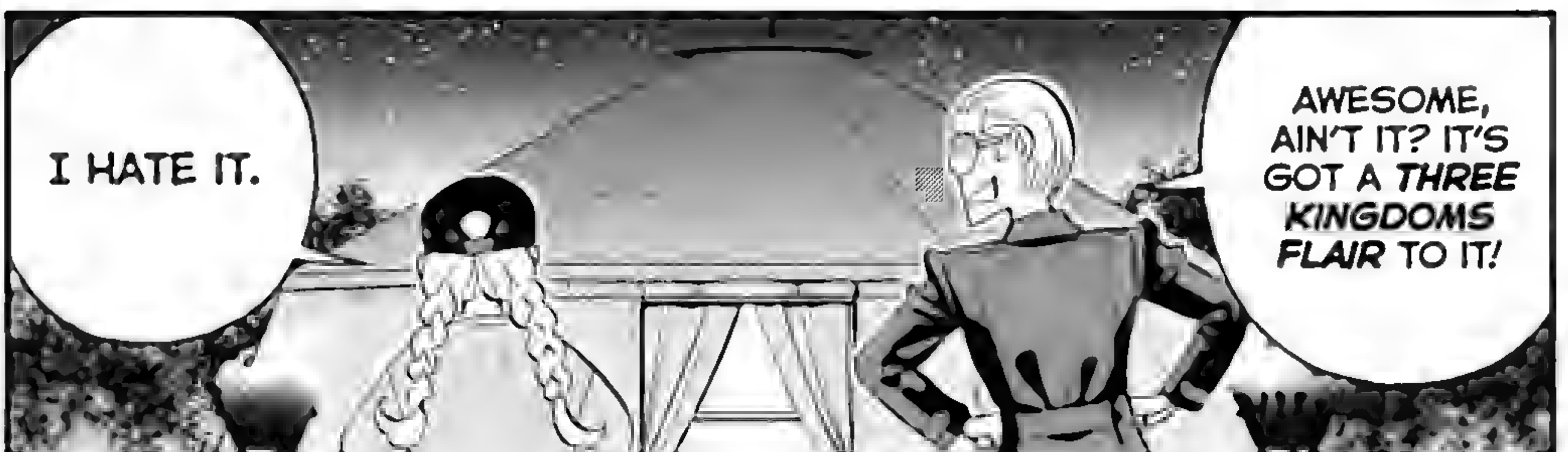


LOOKING GOOD!



BOSS...  
WHAT THE  
HECK IS  
THAT?

WHO WOULD'VE  
THOUGHT IT'D  
HAVE SUCH A  
**FINAL BATTLE**  
KINDA FEEL! I'M  
ALL PUMPED!



I HATE IT.

AWESOME,  
AIN'T IT? IT'S  
GOT A **THREE  
KINGDOMS**  
FLAIR TO IT!

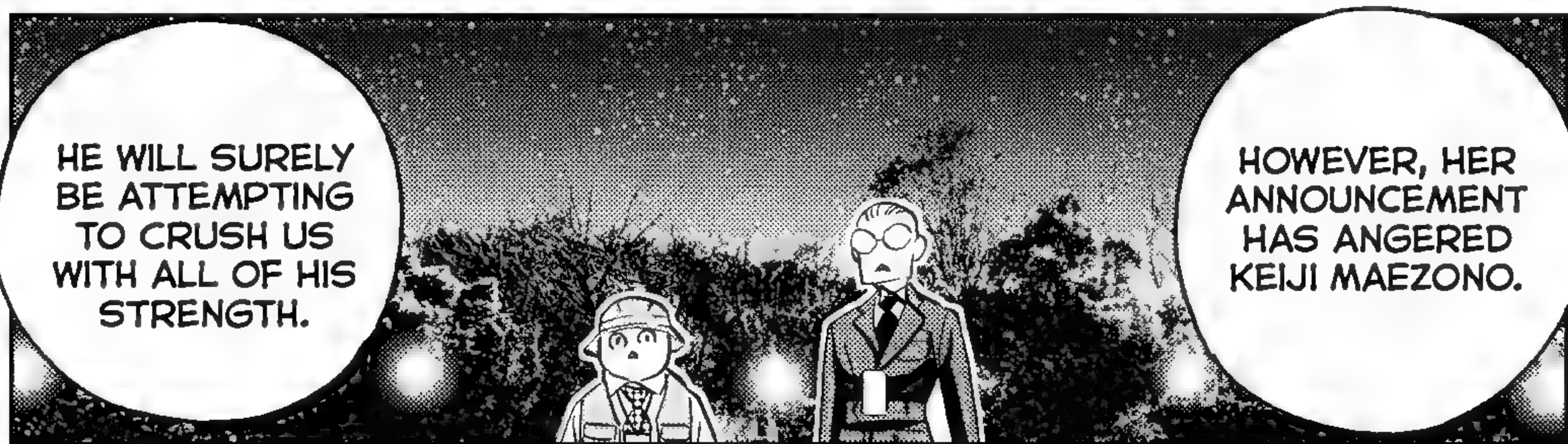
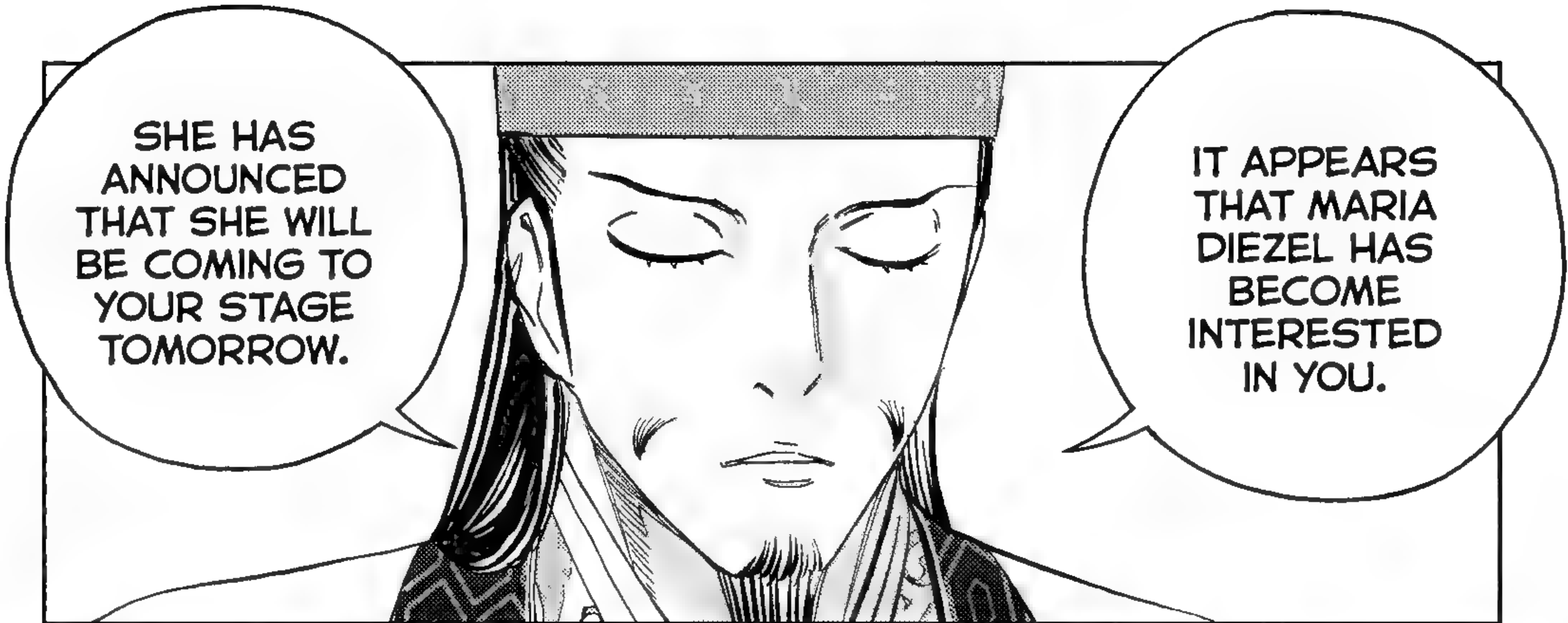




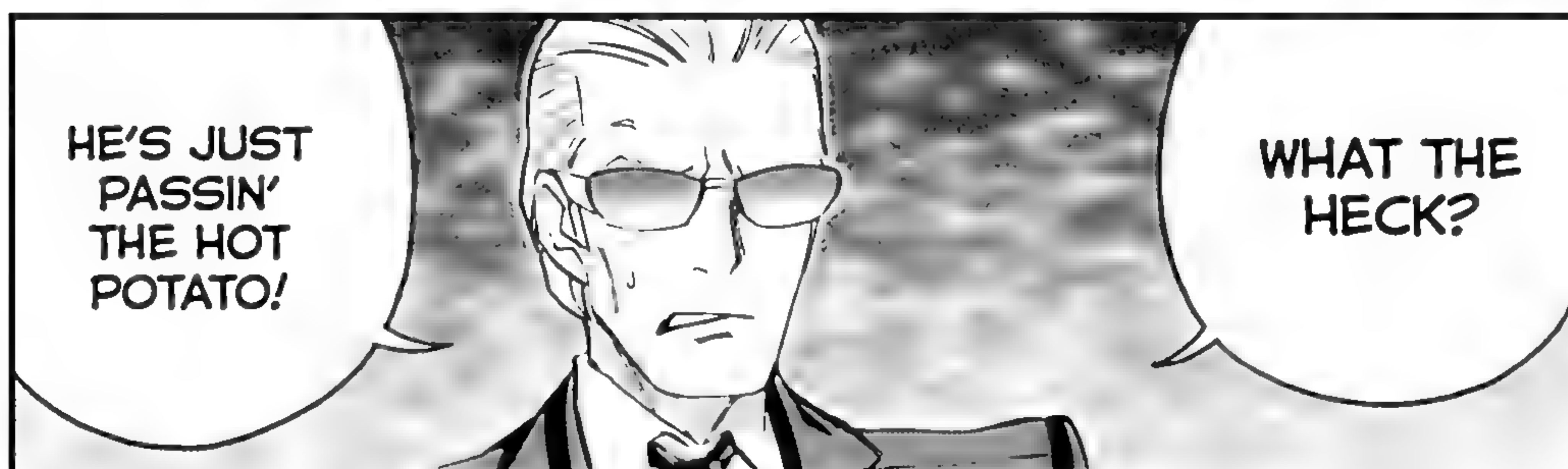




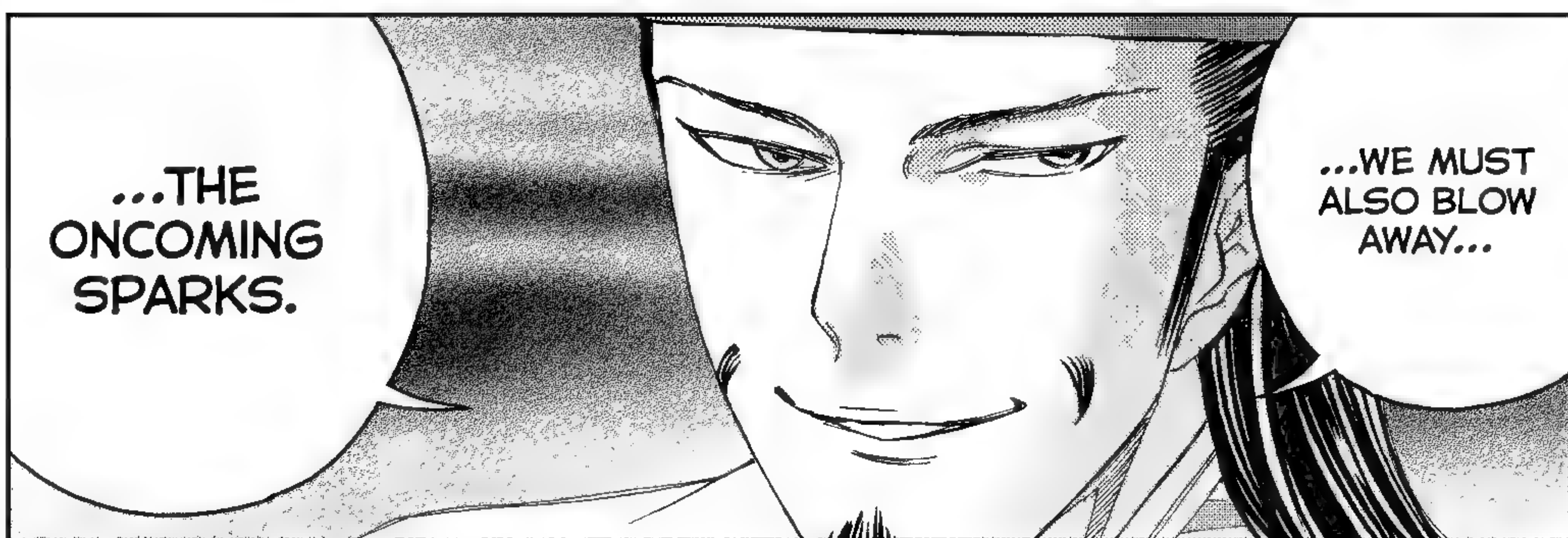
















4  
IRK



We received permission  
from Producer Kondo.  
Whether you wish to intrude  
or strike, do as you please.  
From Eiko's tactician,  
Zhuge Kongming



WE'RE  
GONNA  
ELIMINATE  
THEM!

THAT'S  
IT!



CHAPTER 79 END



1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!



CHAPTER 80 The Start of Summer Sonia

2020...

...Summer  
Sonia's  
Day one...

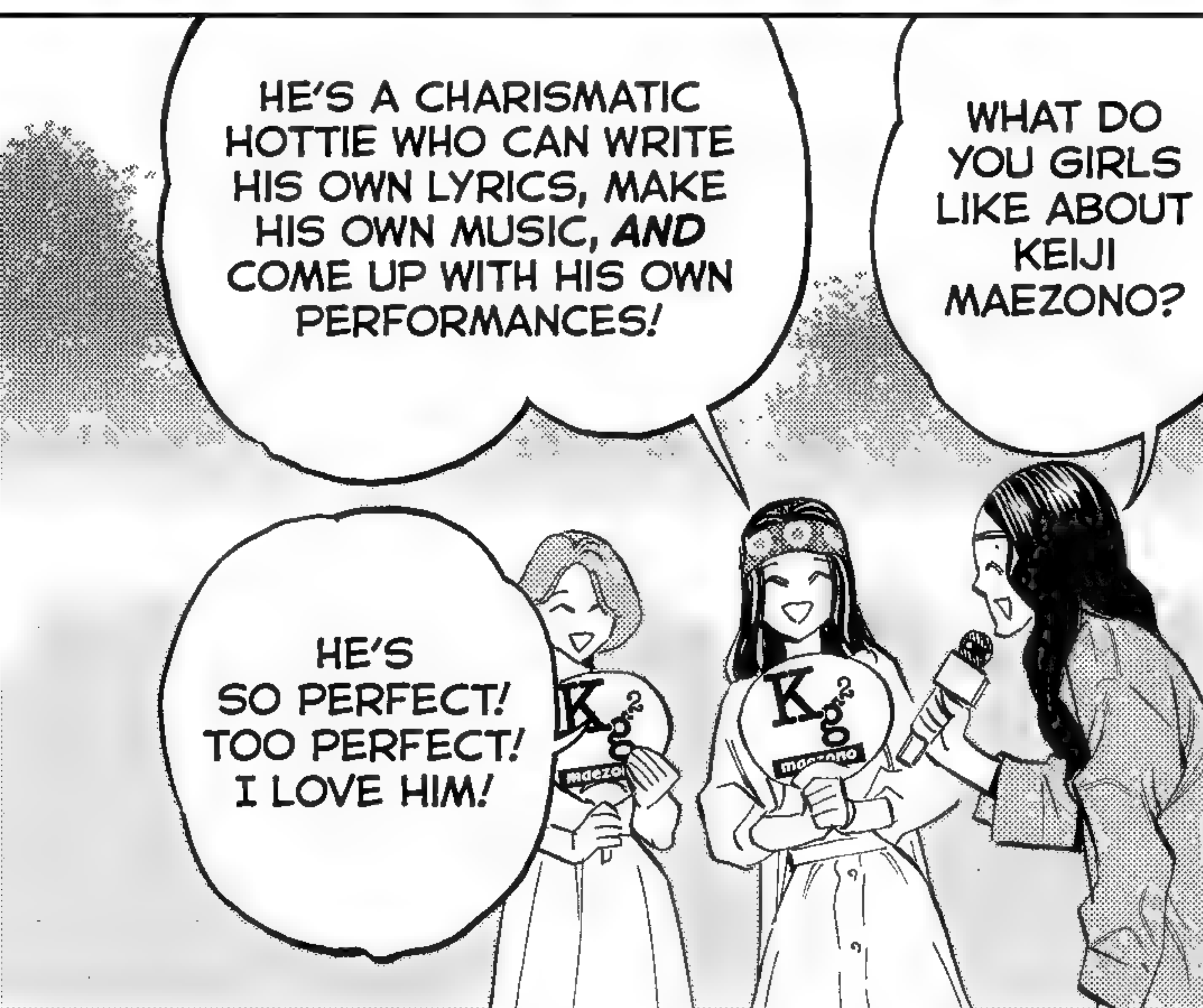
RAAAAH

...starts noooooow!!

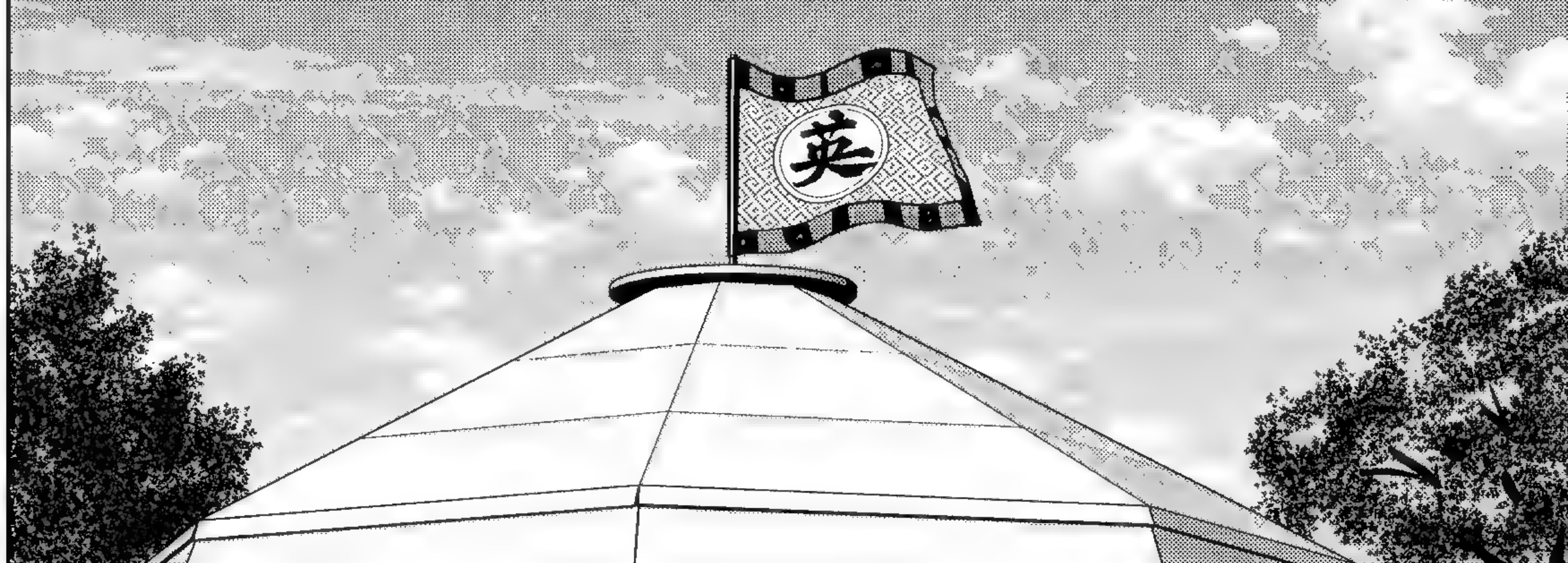
YEEEEAAAH

IIII













I HOPE MY  
PERFORMANCE  
WON'T BE AT  
RISK...

IT'S  
INSANE  
HOW  
POPULAR  
HE IS.

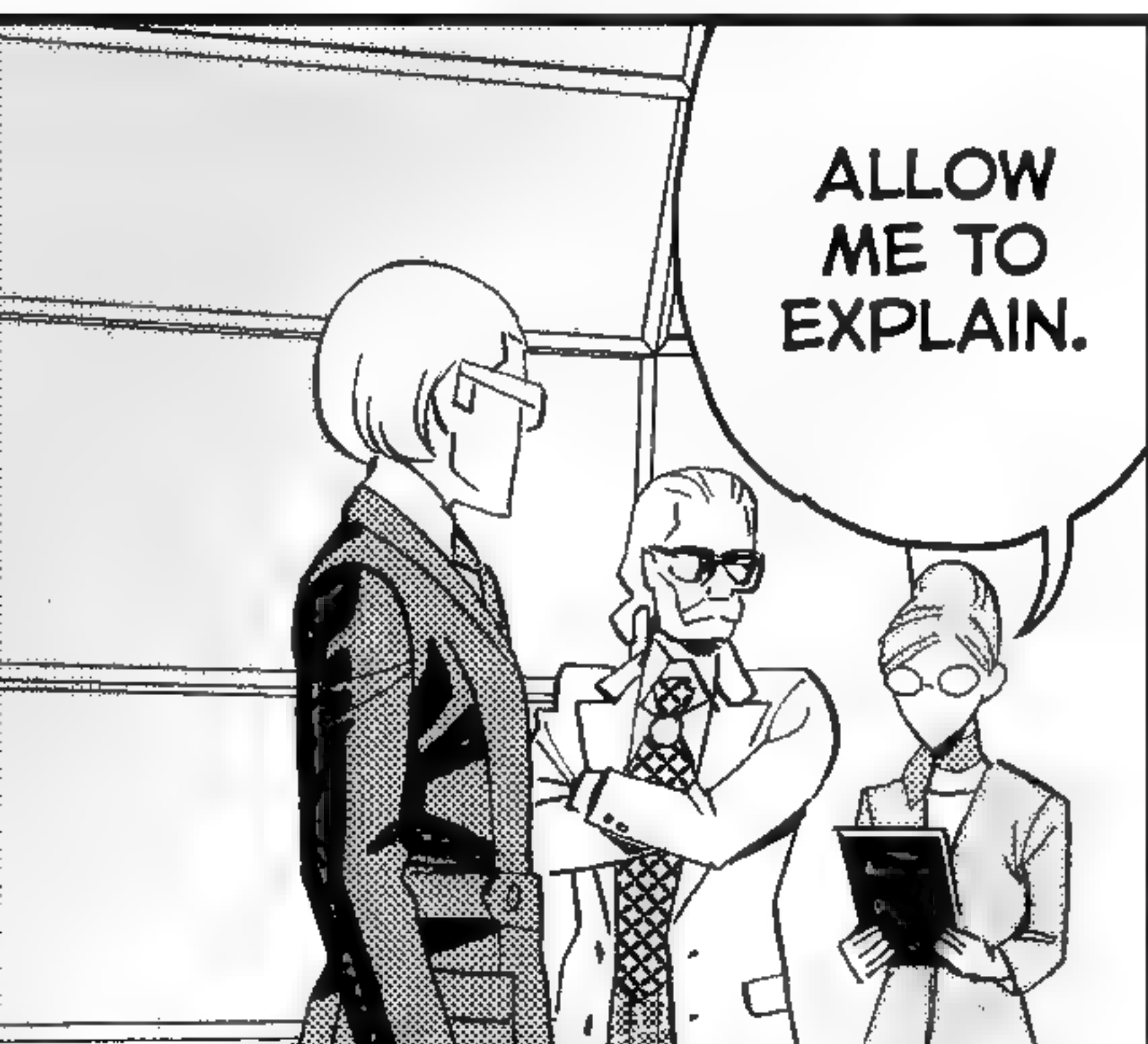
THEY'RE ALL  
HERE FOR  
MAEZONO...



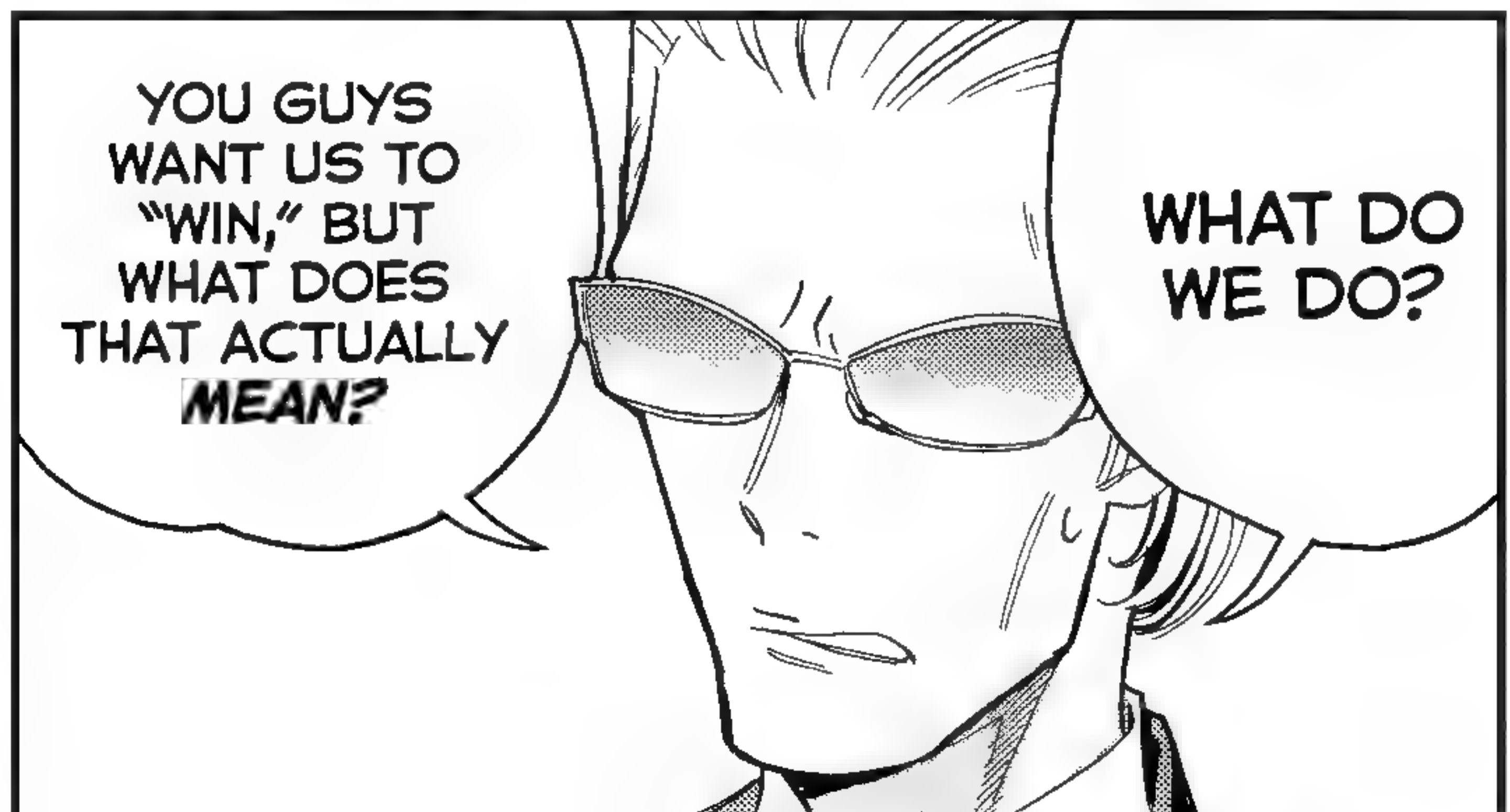
AT THIS  
RATE, WE  
CAN EXPECT  
THE CRYSTAL  
STAGE...

IT SEEMS  
THAT THERE  
ARE ABOUT  
10,000 KEIJI  
MAEZONO  
FANS HERE  
ALREADY.

TO HAVE  
ITS MAXIMUM  
CAPACITY  
OF 40,000  
GUESTS  
FILLED.



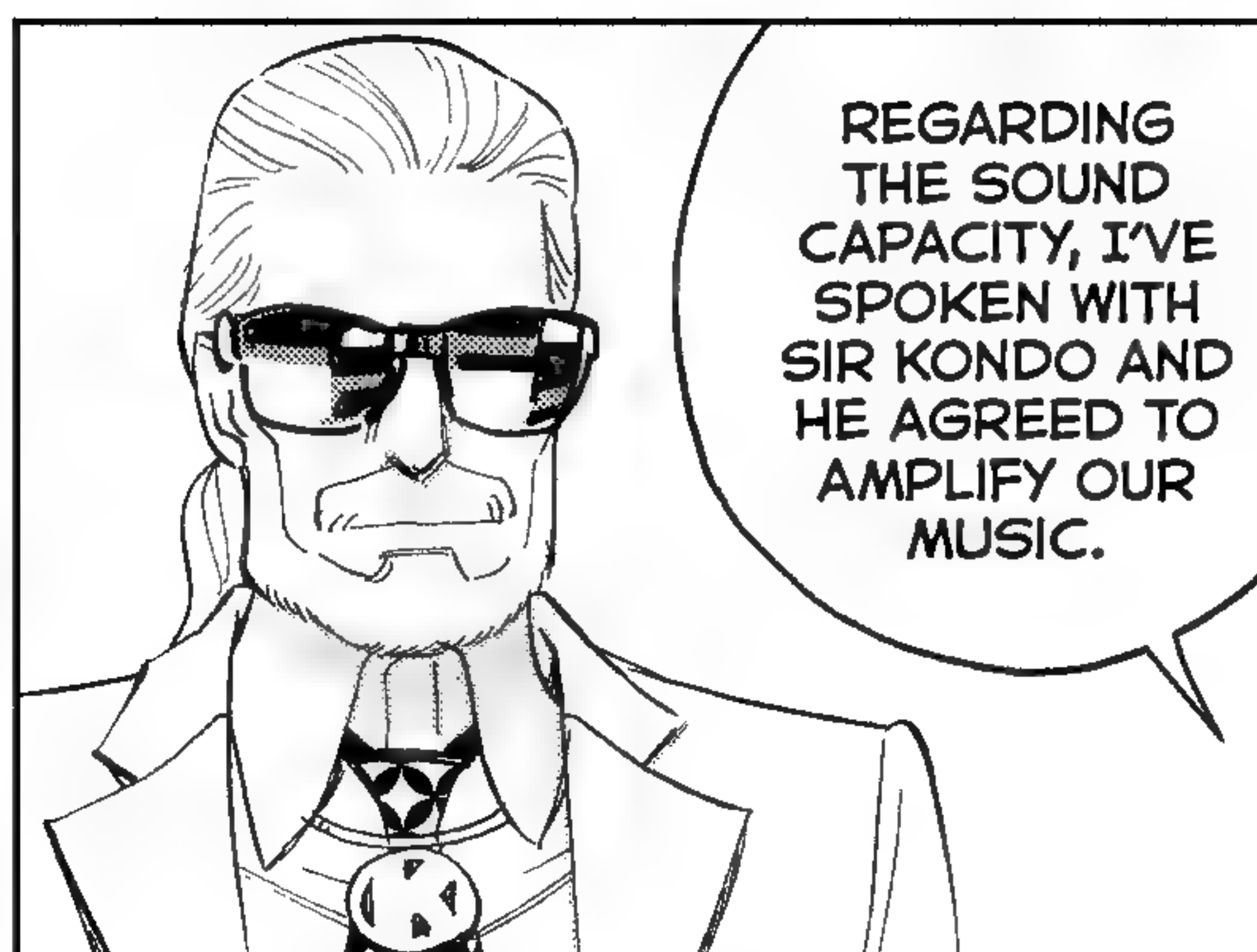
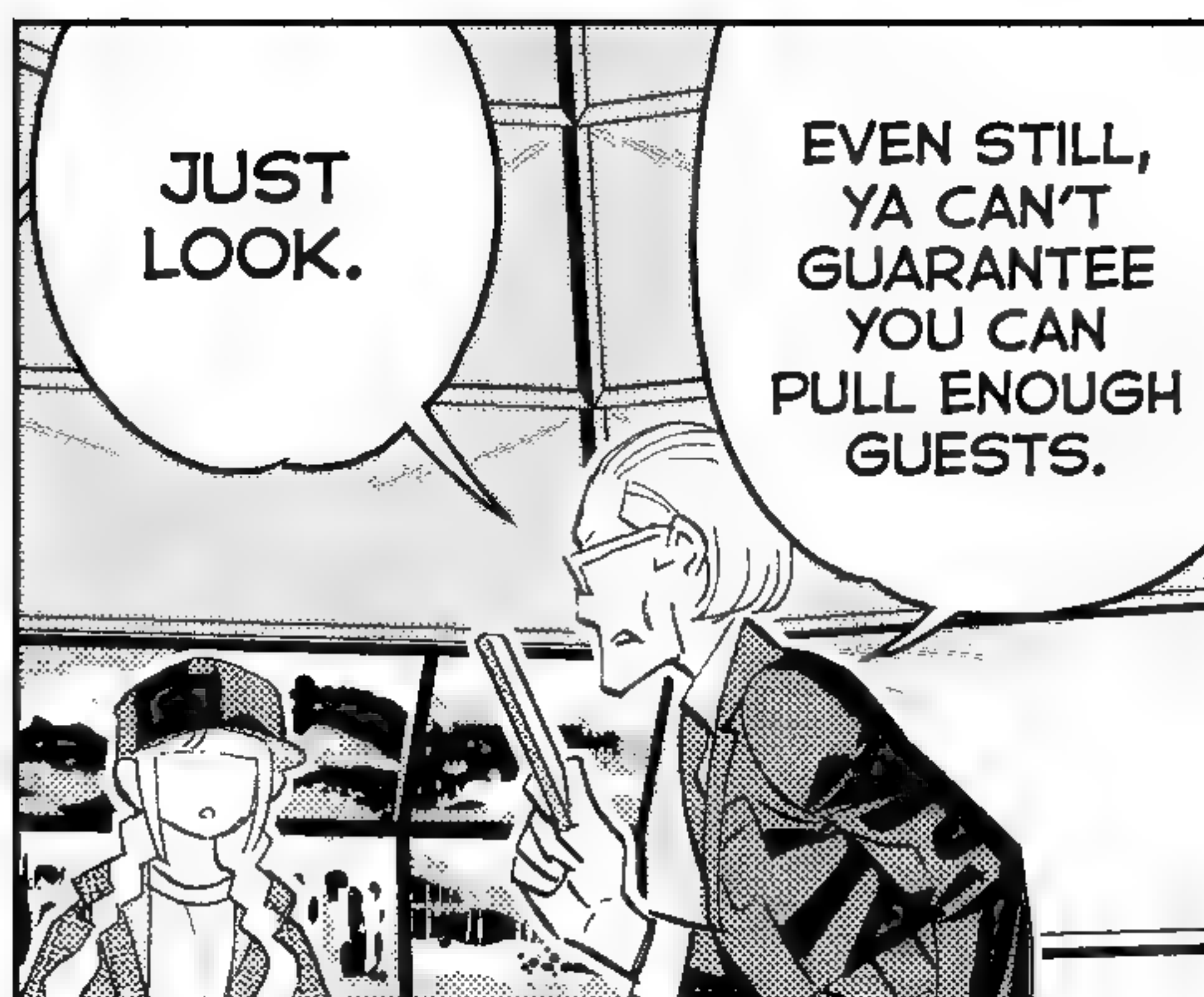
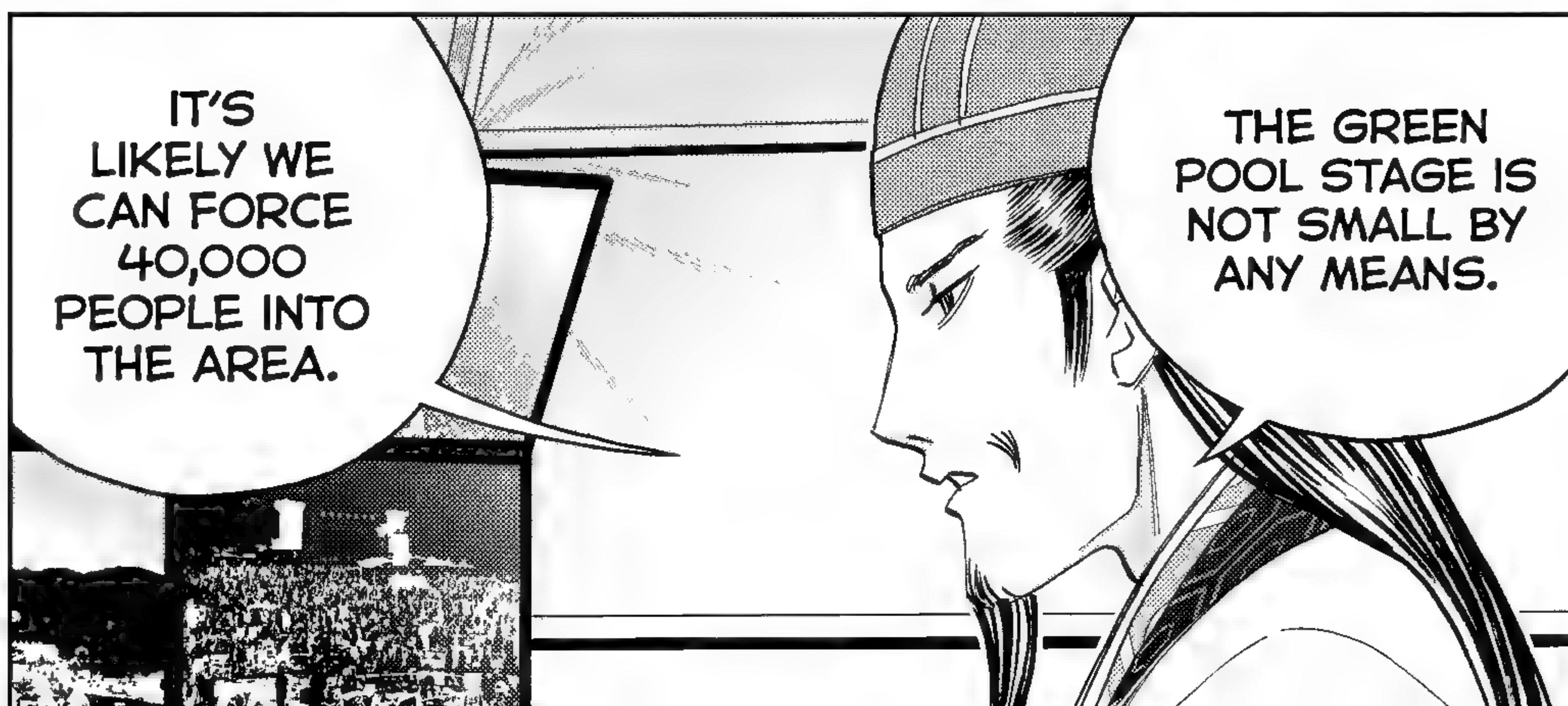
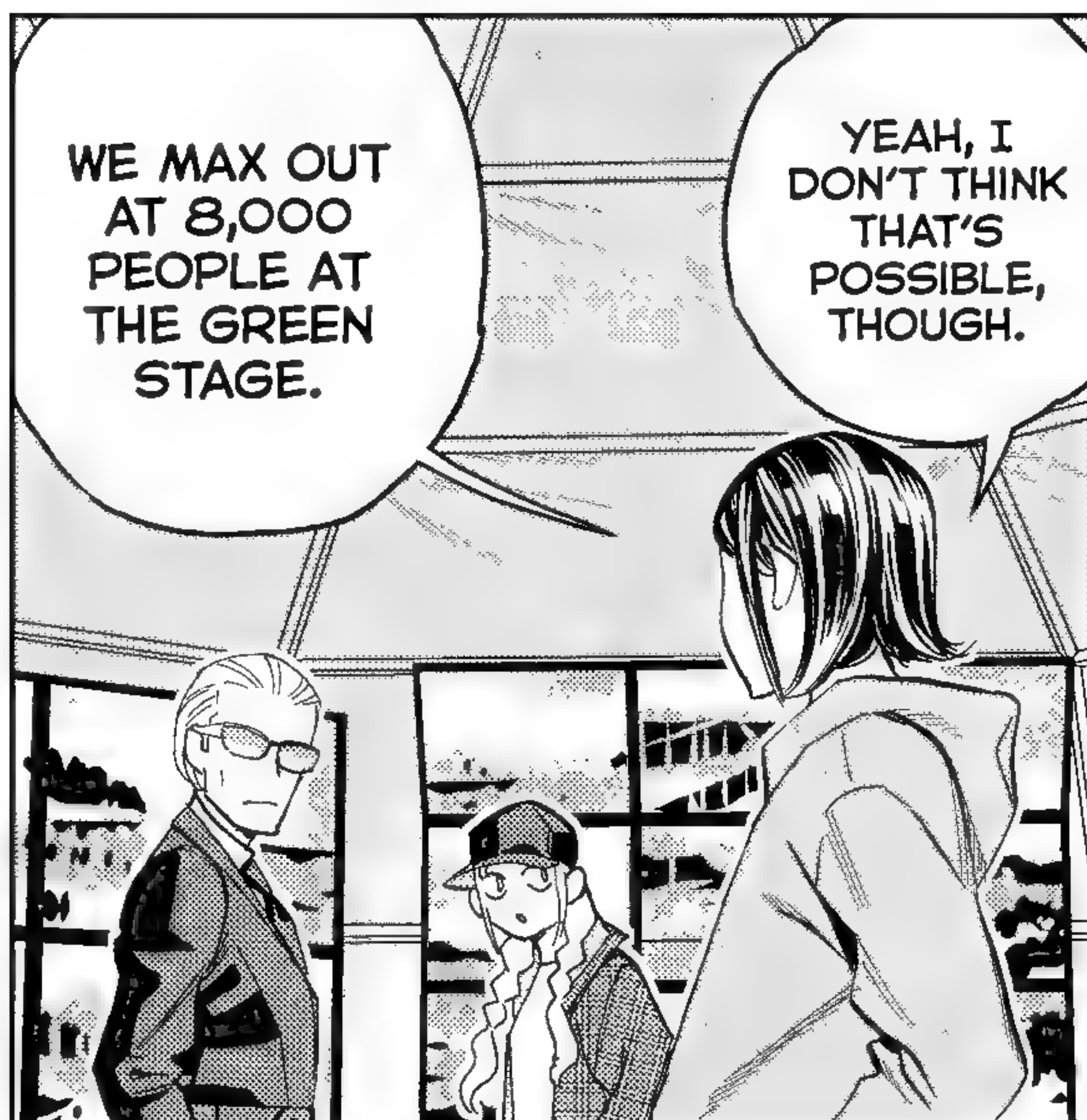
ALLOW  
ME TO  
EXPLAIN.



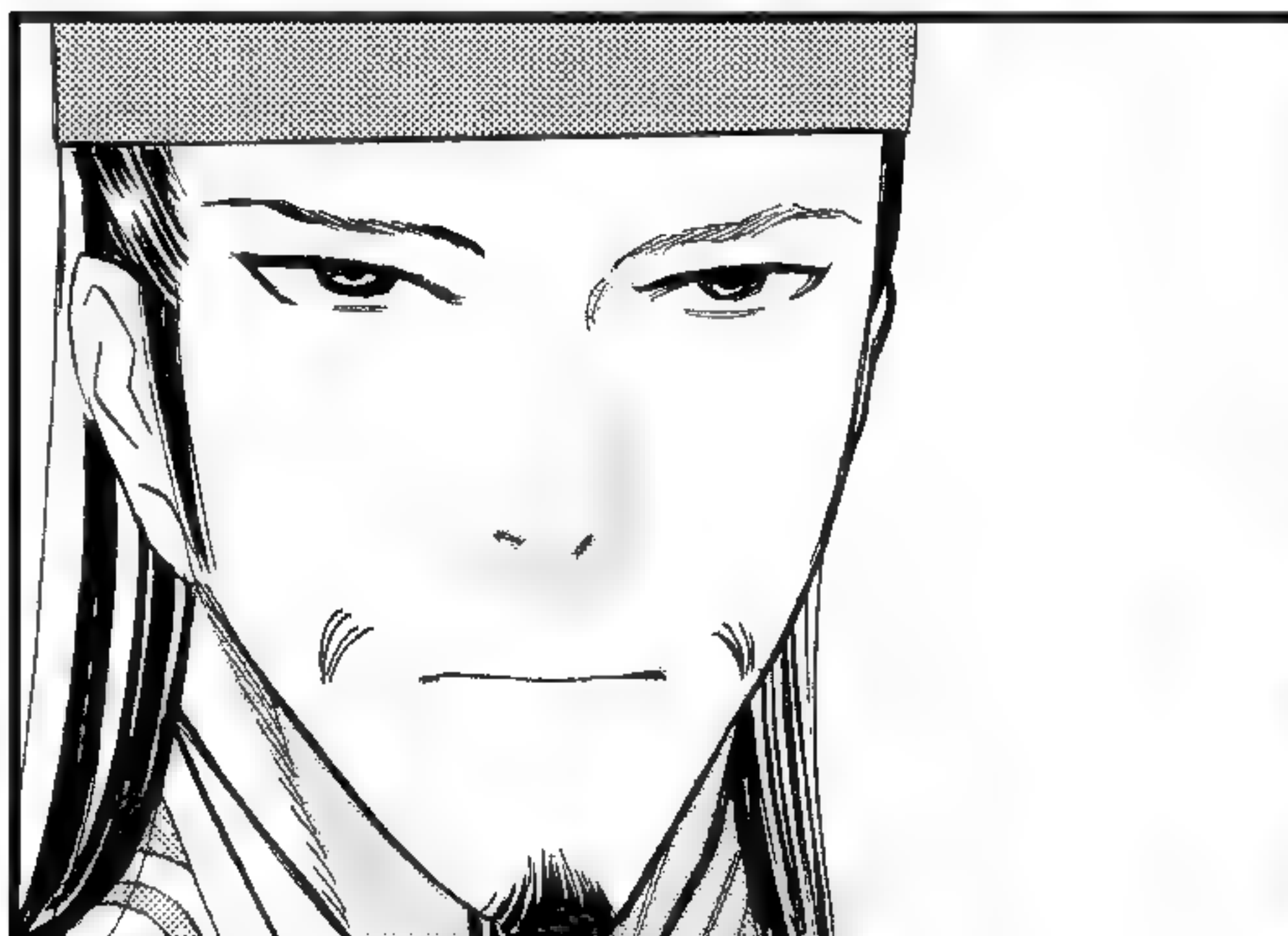
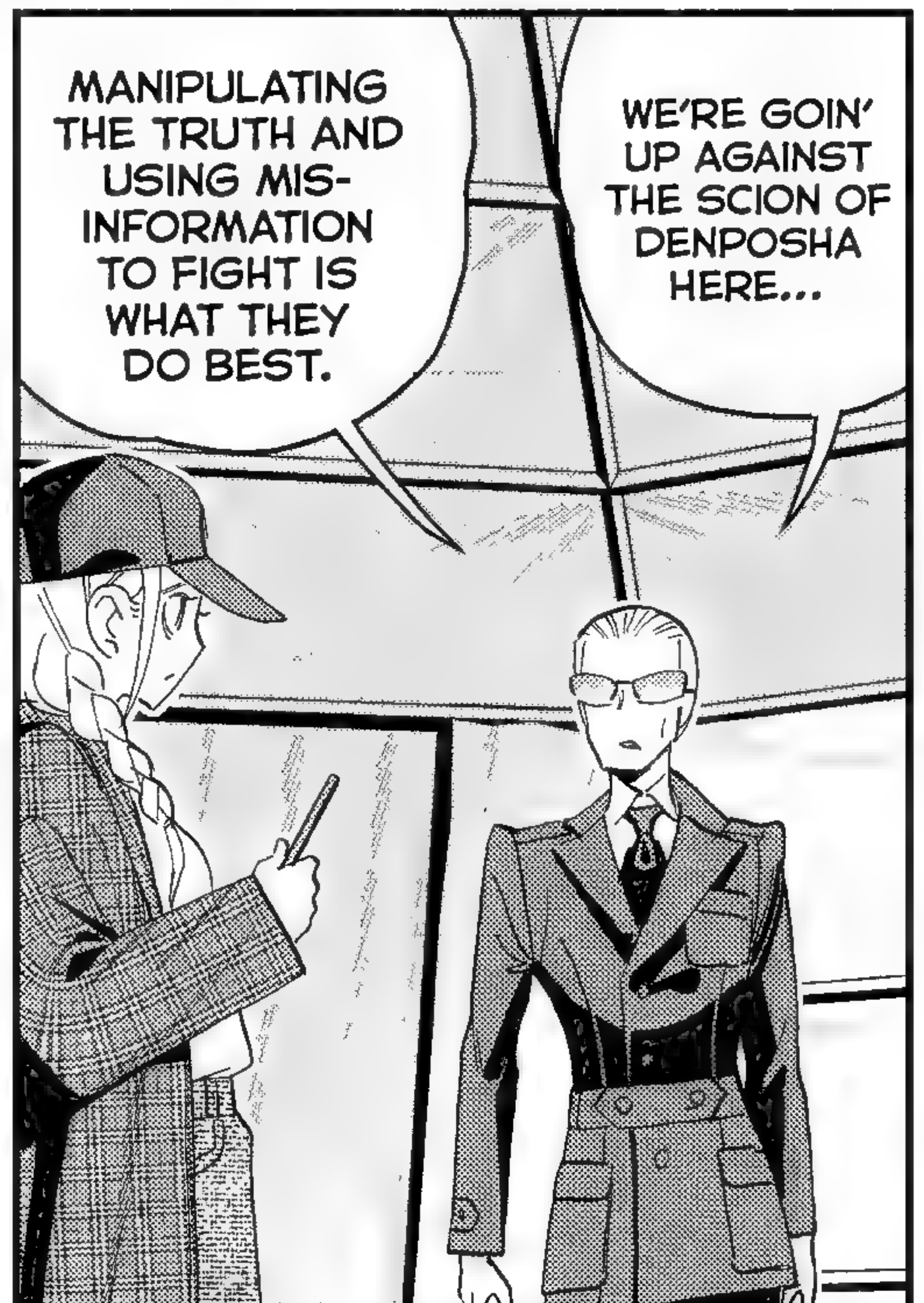
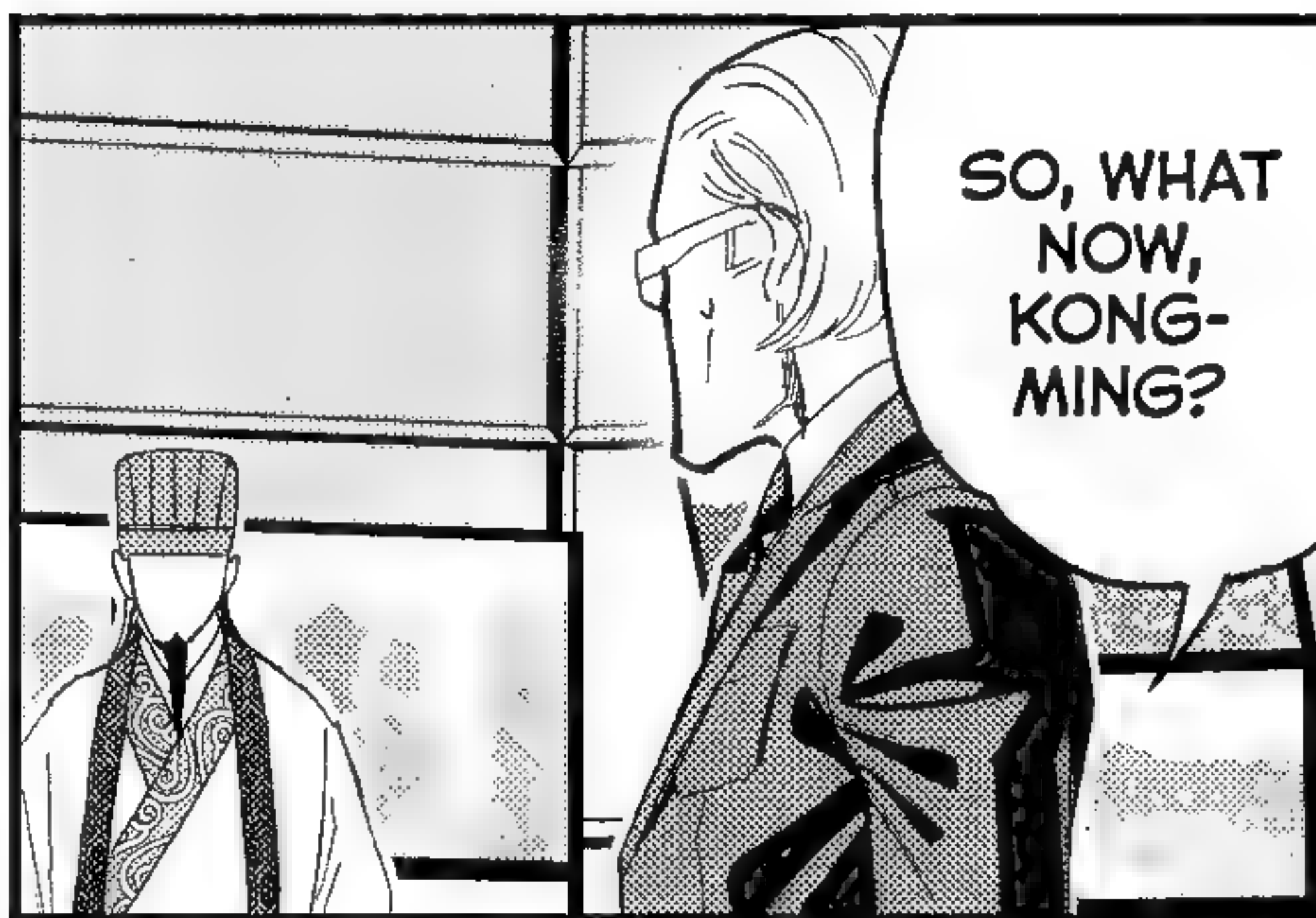
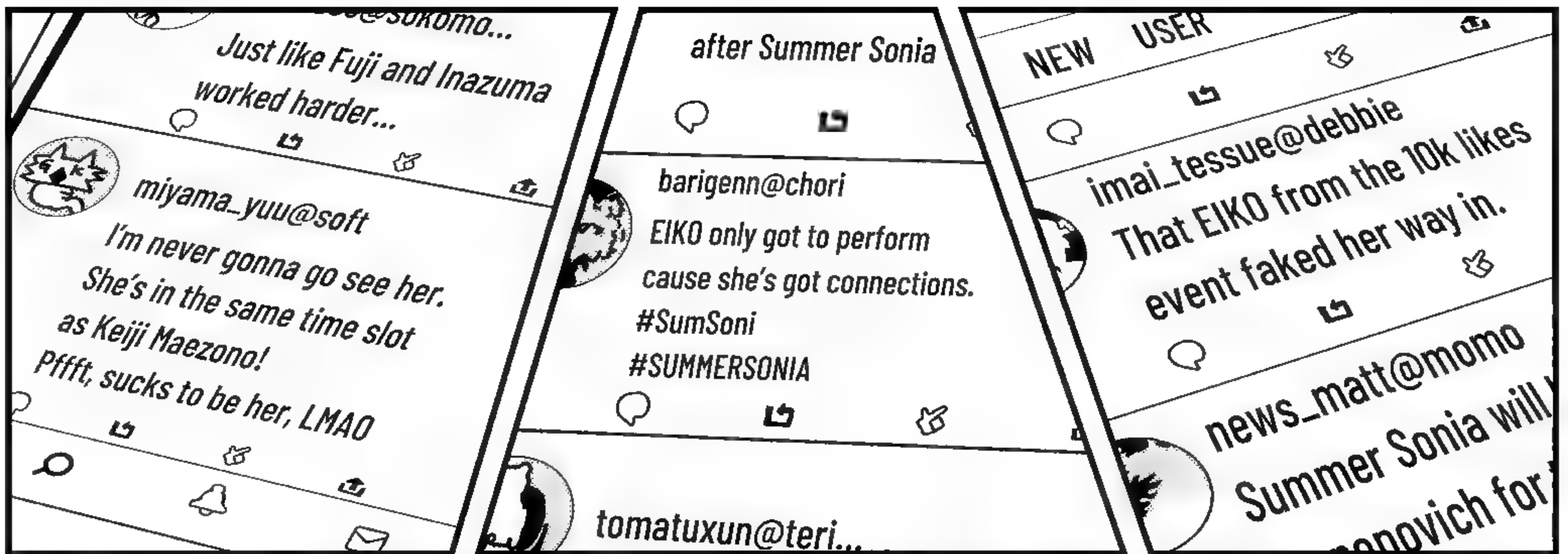
YOU GUYS  
WANT US TO  
"WIN," BUT  
WHAT DOES  
THAT ACTUALLY  
MEAN?

WHAT DO  
WE DO?

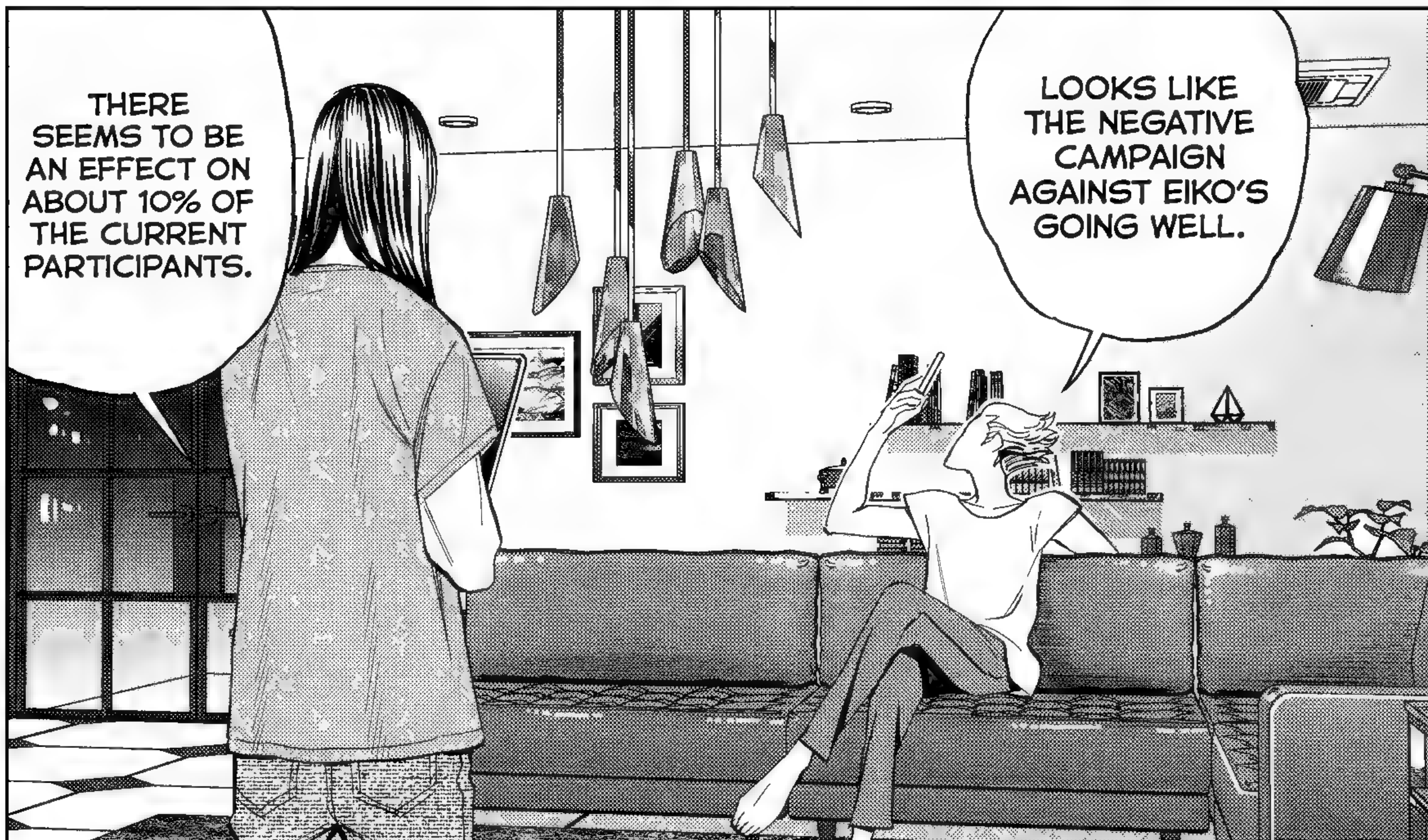
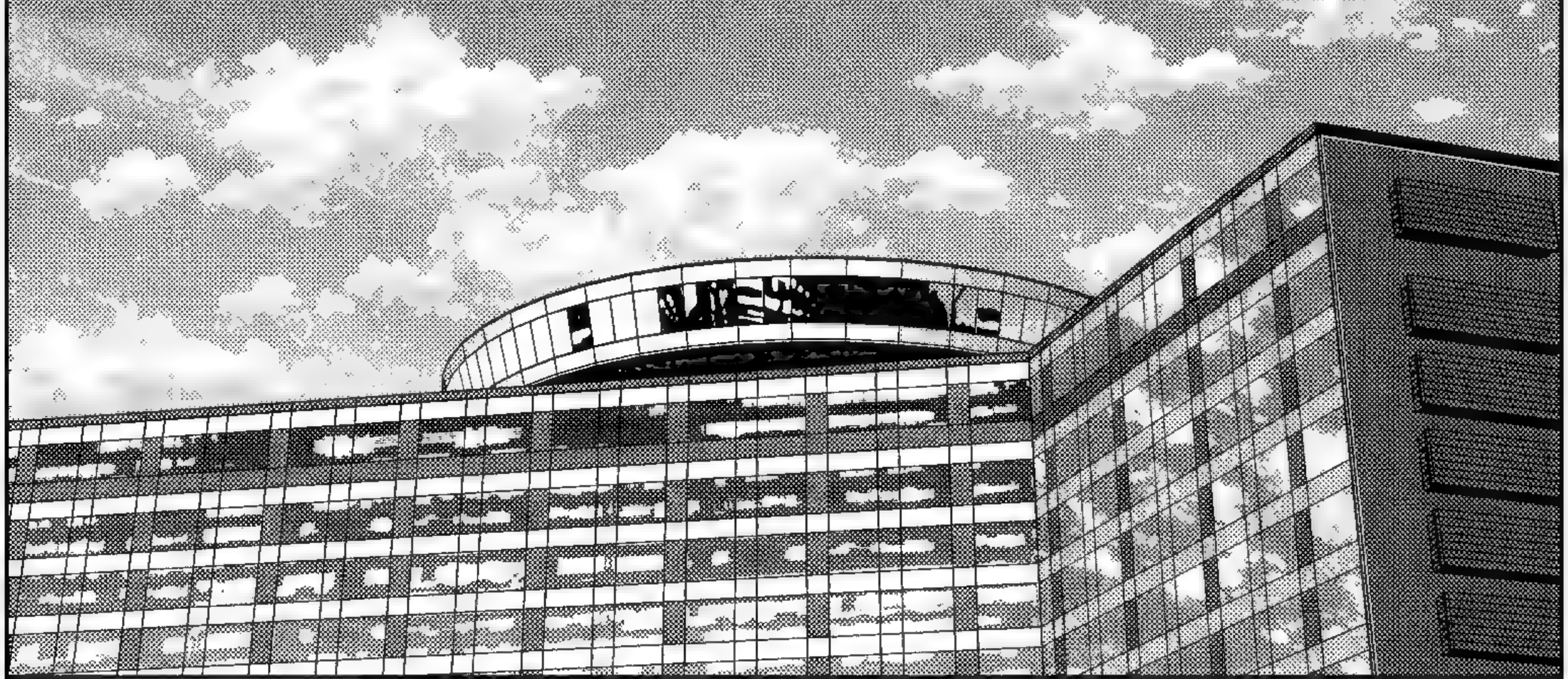






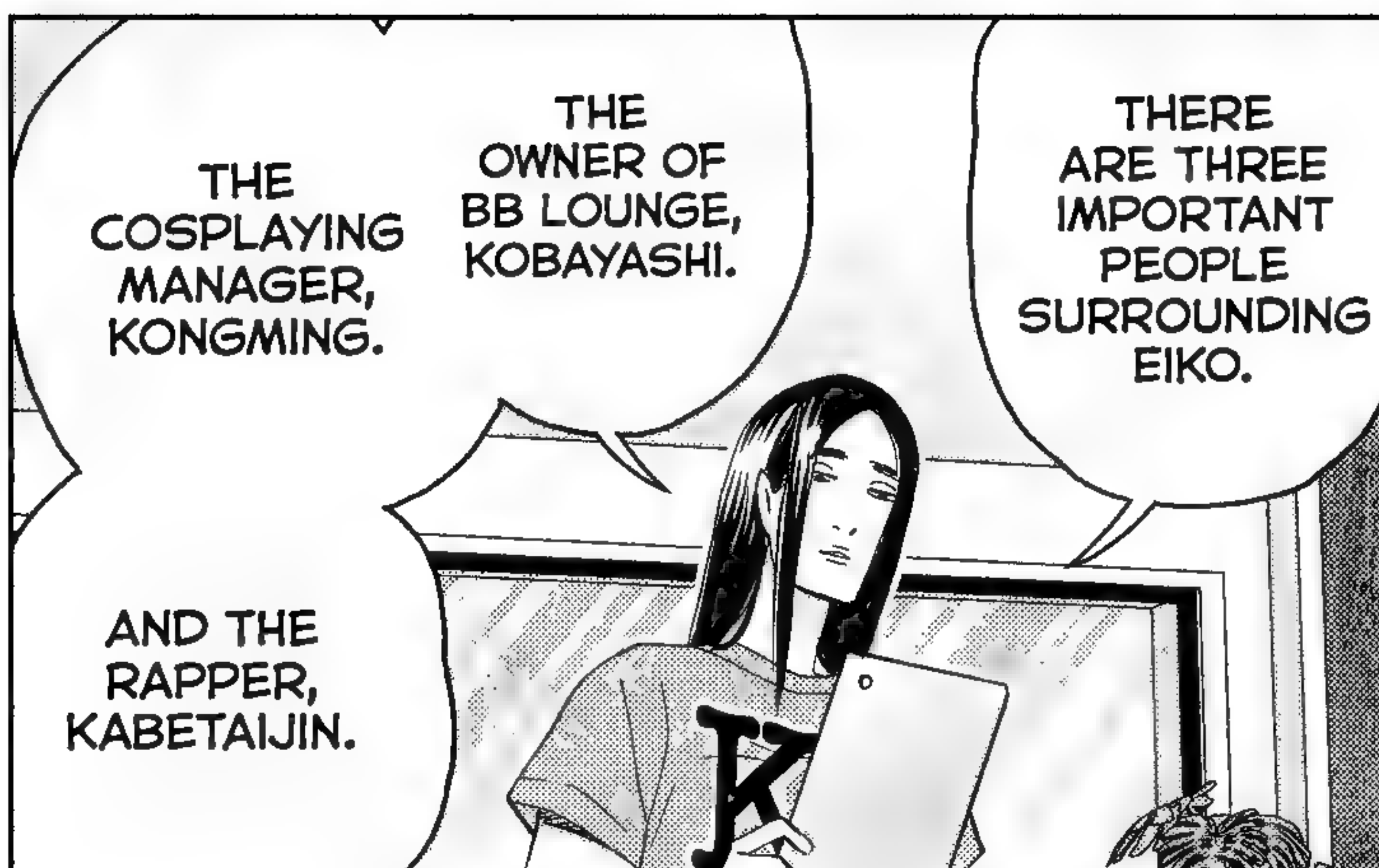






THERE  
SEEMS TO BE  
AN EFFECT ON  
ABOUT 10% OF  
THE CURRENT  
PARTICIPANTS.

LOOKS LIKE  
THE NEGATIVE  
CAMPAIGN  
AGAINST EIKO'S  
GOING WELL.



THE  
COSPLAYING  
MANAGER,  
KONGMING.

THE  
OWNER OF  
BB LOUNGE,  
KOBAYASHI.

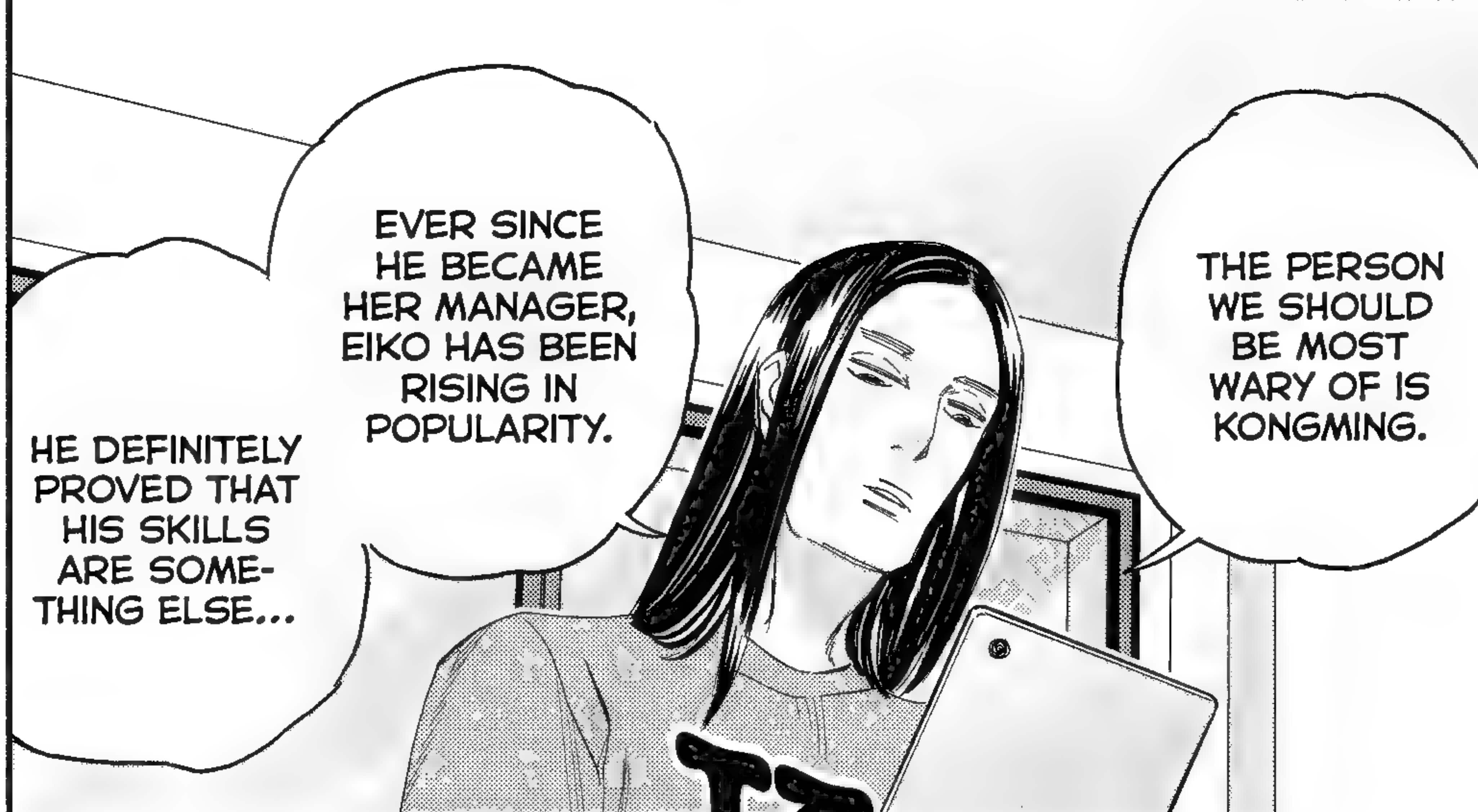
THERE  
ARE THREE  
IMPORTANT  
PEOPLE  
SURROUNDING  
EIKO.

AND THE  
RAPPER,  
KABETAJIN.



SO...  
HOW'S  
OUR  
ENEMY  
FARING?





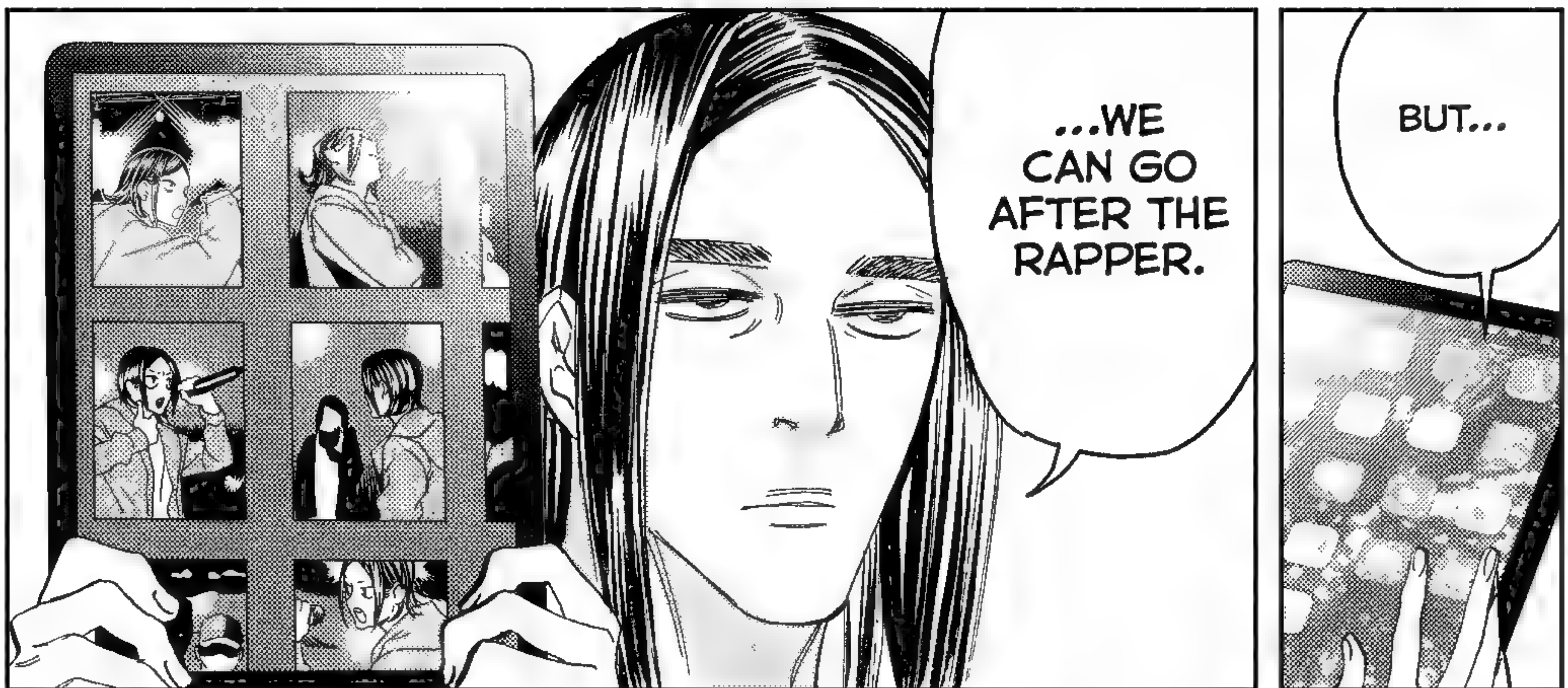




HE DOESN'T  
SEEM LIKE  
SOMEONE  
WHO'D TAKE  
THE BAIT. IT'D  
BE DIFFICULT  
TO CONVINCE  
HIM.

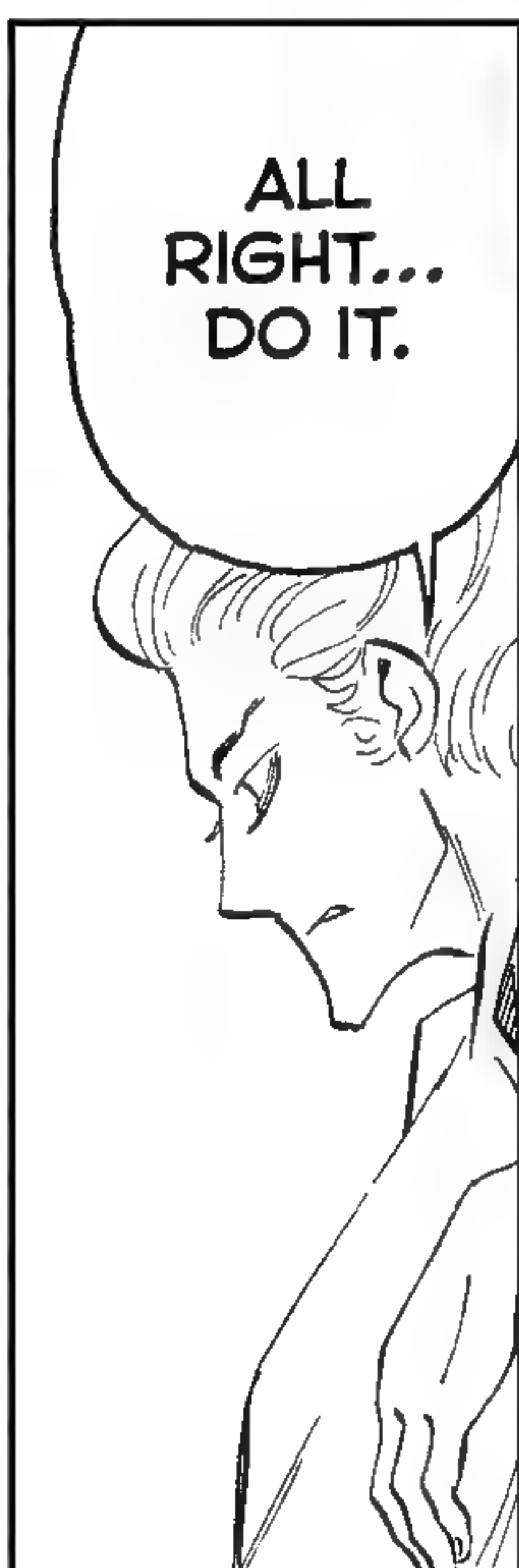
DOESN'T  
SEEM  
LIKE IT.

CAN WE  
BUY THE  
GUY OFF?



...WE  
CAN GO  
AFTER THE  
RAPPER.

BUT...



ALL  
RIGHT...  
DO IT.



HE SHOULD  
BE EASILY  
CONVINCED  
WITH A BIT  
OF CASH.

WE CAN PULL HIM  
TO OUR SIDE AND  
DESTROY WHAT  
LITTLE POWER  
SHE HAS LEFT.

HE WILL BE  
PERFORMING  
ON EIKO'S  
STAGE THIS  
TIME.



PRETEND TO  
BE WHOEVER  
YOU WANT...

We received permission  
from Producer Kondo.  
Whether you wish to intrude  
or strike, do as you please.

From Eiko's tactician,  
Zhuge Kongming

KONG-  
MING...

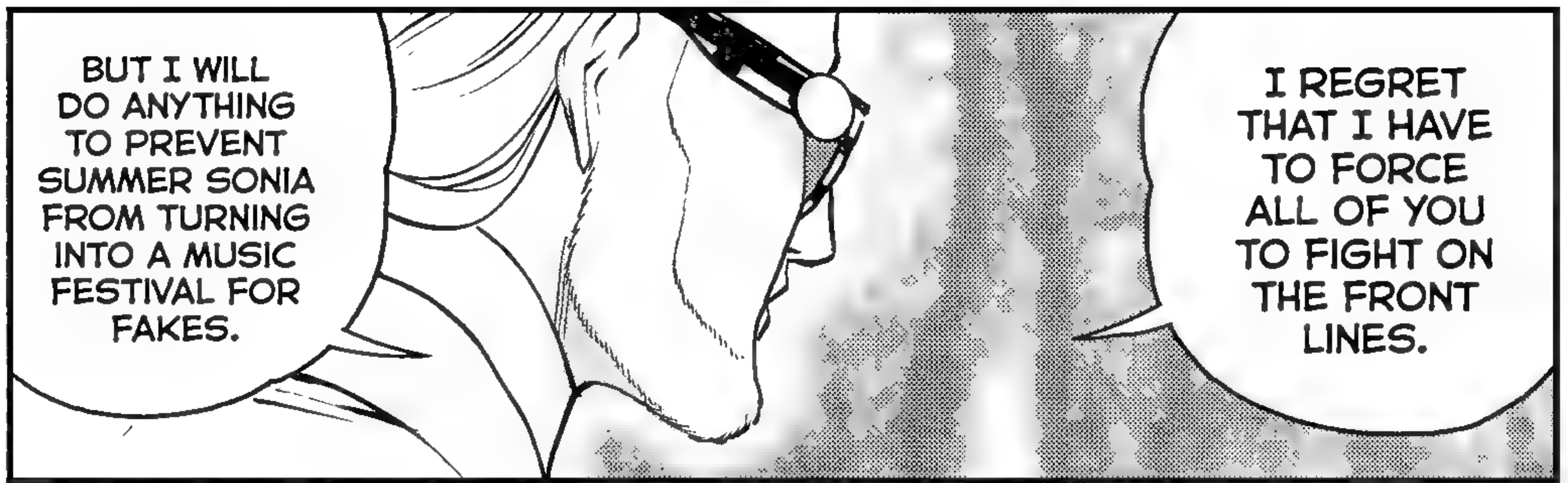
BUT  
I'LL SHOW  
YOU WHAT IT  
MEANS TO  
HIT ROCK-  
BOTTOM...





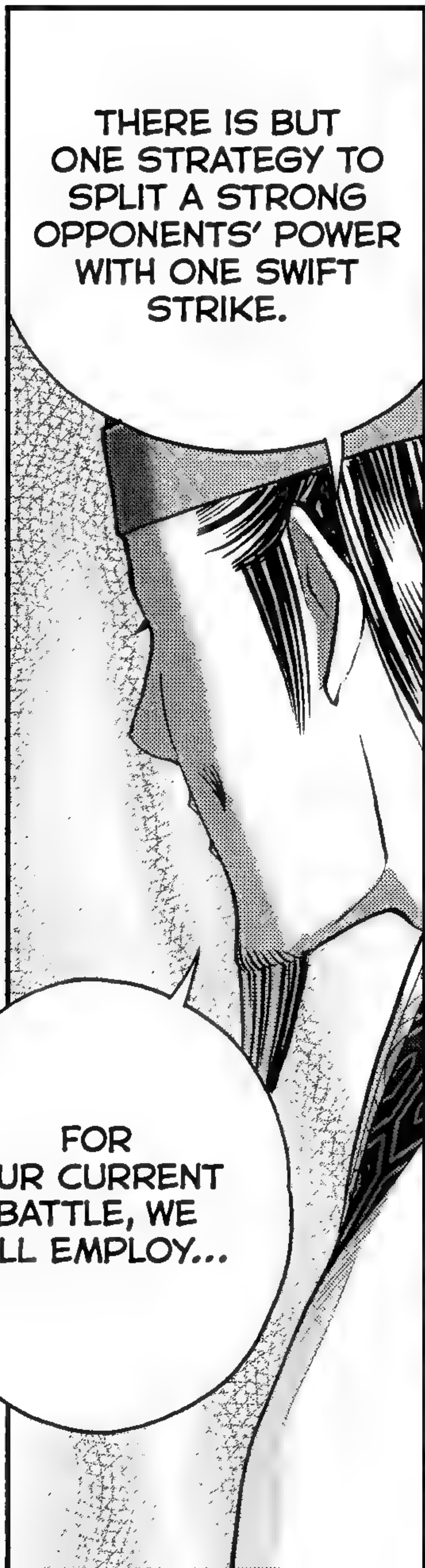






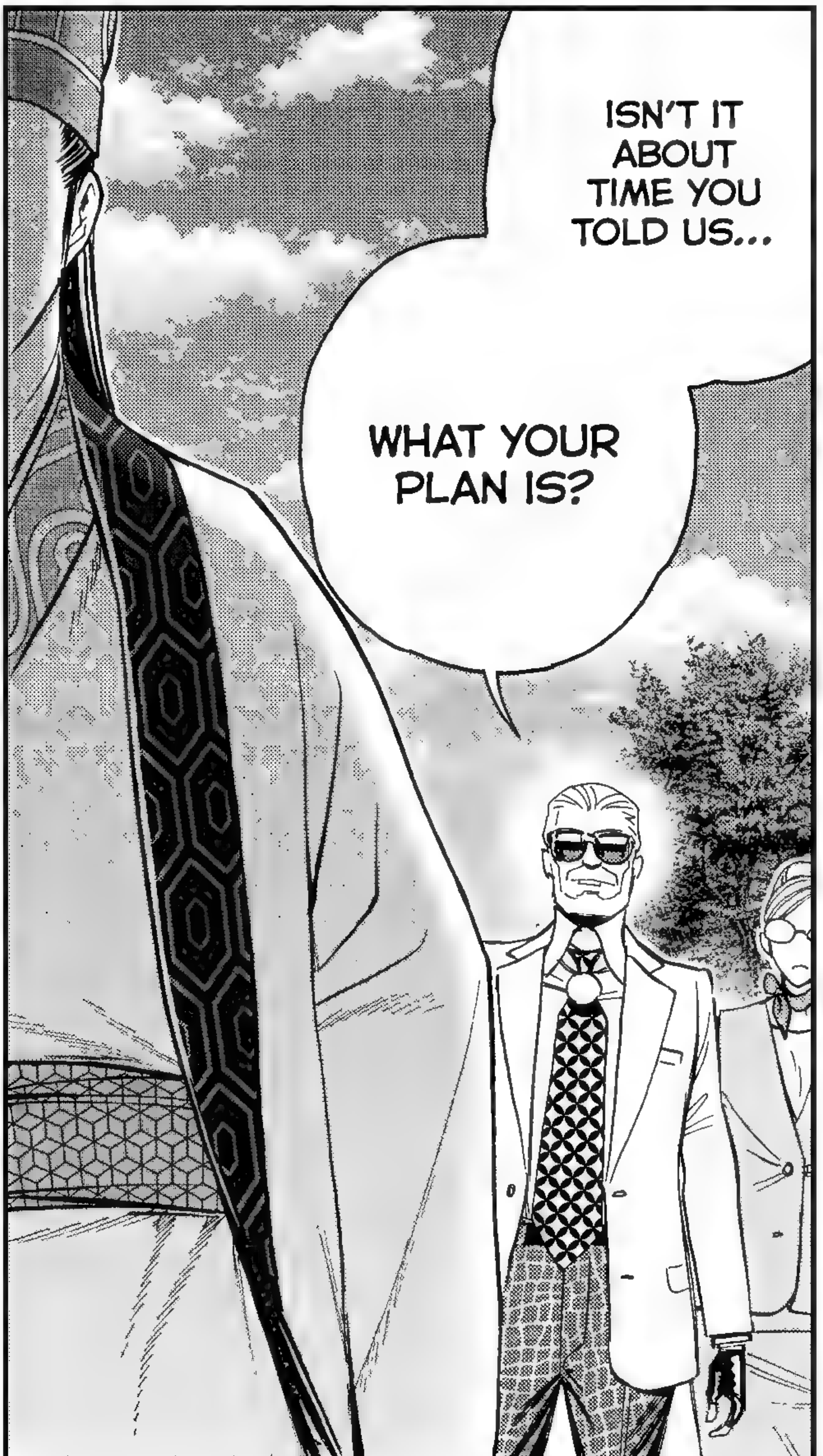
BUT I WILL  
DO ANYTHING  
TO PREVENT  
SUMMER SONIA  
FROM TURNING  
INTO A MUSIC  
FESTIVAL FOR  
FAKES.

I REGRET  
THAT I HAVE  
TO FORCE  
ALL OF YOU  
TO FIGHT ON  
THE FRONT  
LINES.



THERE IS BUT  
ONE STRATEGY TO  
SPLIT A STRONG  
OPPONENTS' POWER  
WITH ONE SWIFT  
STRIKE.

FOR  
OUR CURRENT  
BATTLE, WE  
WILL EMPLOY...



ISN'T IT  
ABOUT  
TIME YOU  
TOLD US...

WHAT YOUR  
PLAN IS?



**ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU  
MEAN THE FIRE ATTACK  
STRATEGY?!**

**...THE FIRE  
ATTACK  
STRATEGY.**

FIRE  
WHAT  
NOW?

COME  
WITH  
ME.

HEH  
HEH  
HEH.

WHAT?!  
NO WAY!

YOU'RE  
NOT GONNA  
ACTUALLY  
SET THE WHOLE  
MOUNTAIN ON  
FIRE...ARE YA?

HEY, YO! HOLD  
ON A SEC!  
FIRE ATTACK?!  
YOU'RE BEIN'  
METAPHORICAL,  
RIGHT?!

WHAT'S  
THAT?  
FIRE  
ATTACK?

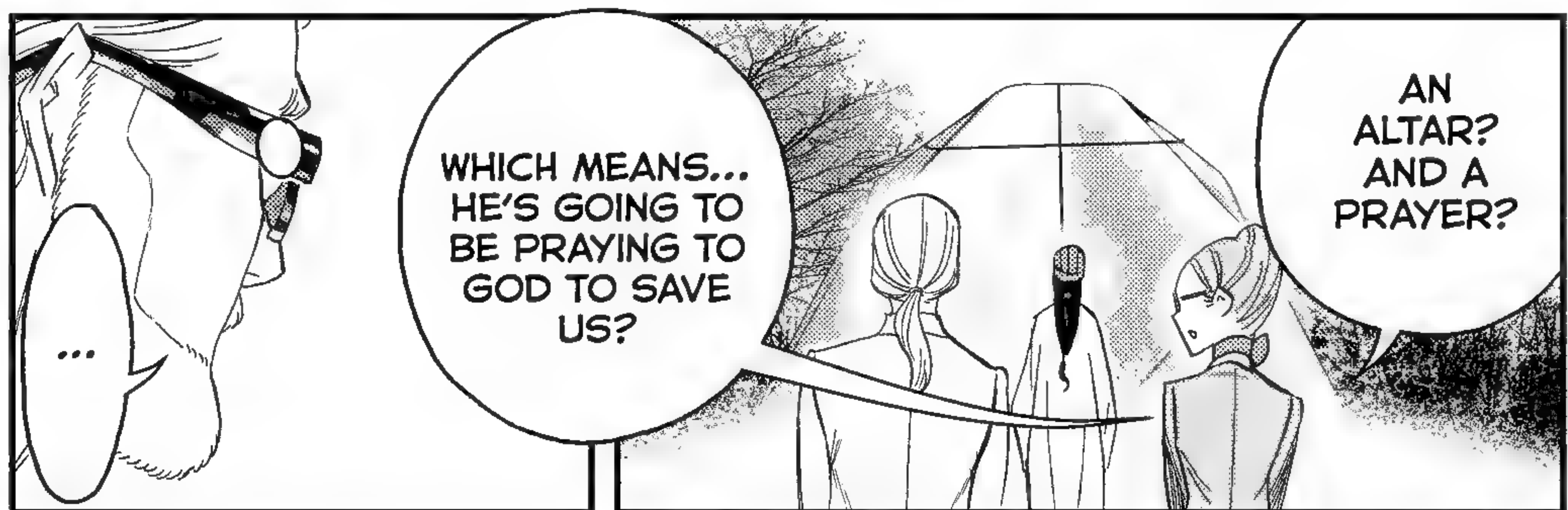
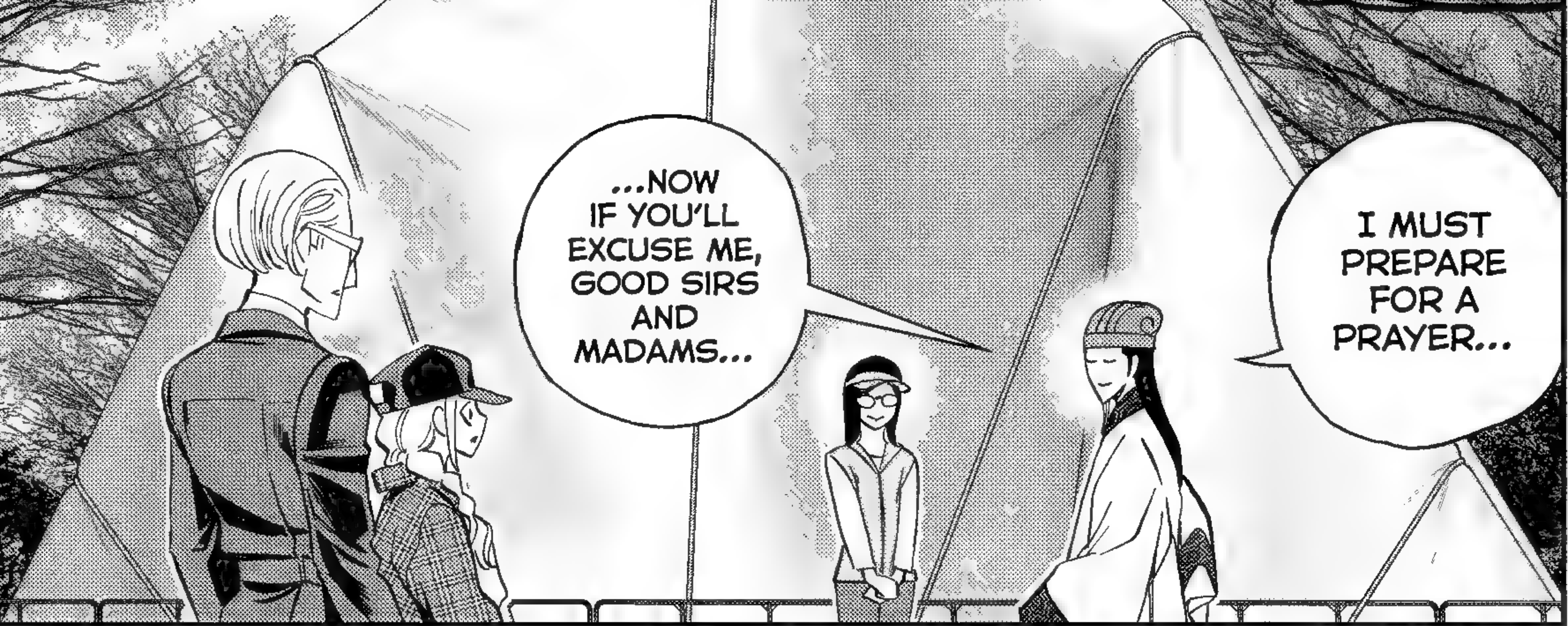
FWSH



THIS IS OUR  
SPECIALLY  
PERPARED  
**ALTAR.**









1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!



...AND  
PRAYING  
FOR THE  
GODS'  
AID...

THE FIRE  
ATTACK  
STRATEGY...

AN ALTAR...

...THE WEI ARMY  
WAS ENTIRELY  
ANNIHILATED BY  
THE FIRE ATTACK  
STRATEGY...\*

DURING THE BATTLE  
THAT TURNED THE WAR  
AROUND IN THE THREE  
KINGDOMS, THE  
BATTLE OF RED  
CLIFF...

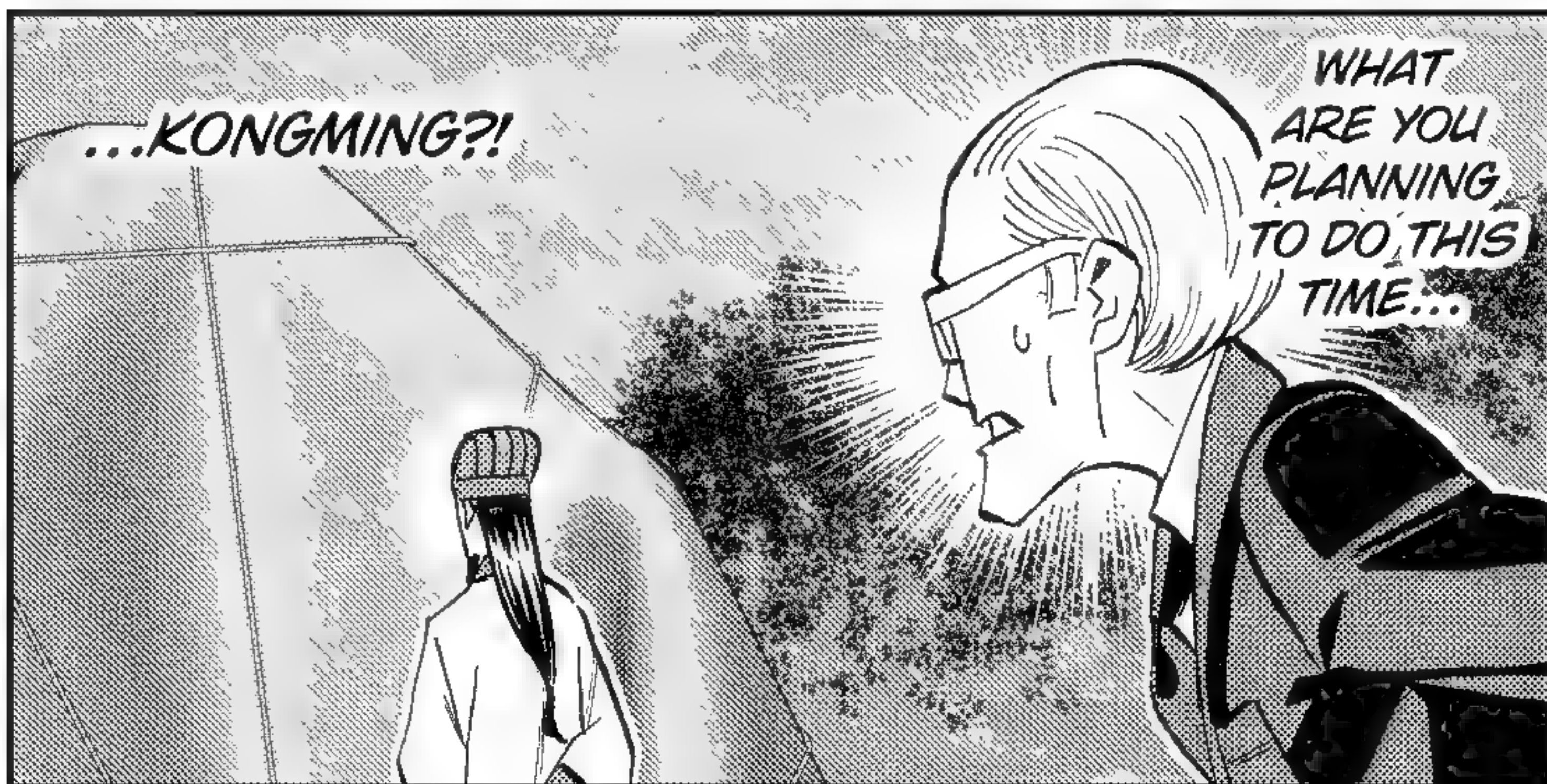
TO COUNTER CAO CAO'S ARMY, HUANG GAI FEIGNED THEIR SURRENDER AND SENT SHIPS TO CAO CAO AS THEY DEFECTED. LITTLE DID CAO CAO KNOW, THE SHIPS WERE FILLED WITH FLAMMABLE MATERIAL AND OILS, AND THE SHIPS BURST INTO FLAME JUST BEFORE THEY COLLIDED INTO CAO CAO'S NAVY, DESTROYING THEIR SHIPS AND KILLING MANY HORSES AND MEN.

CHAPTER 81 Writhing Festival

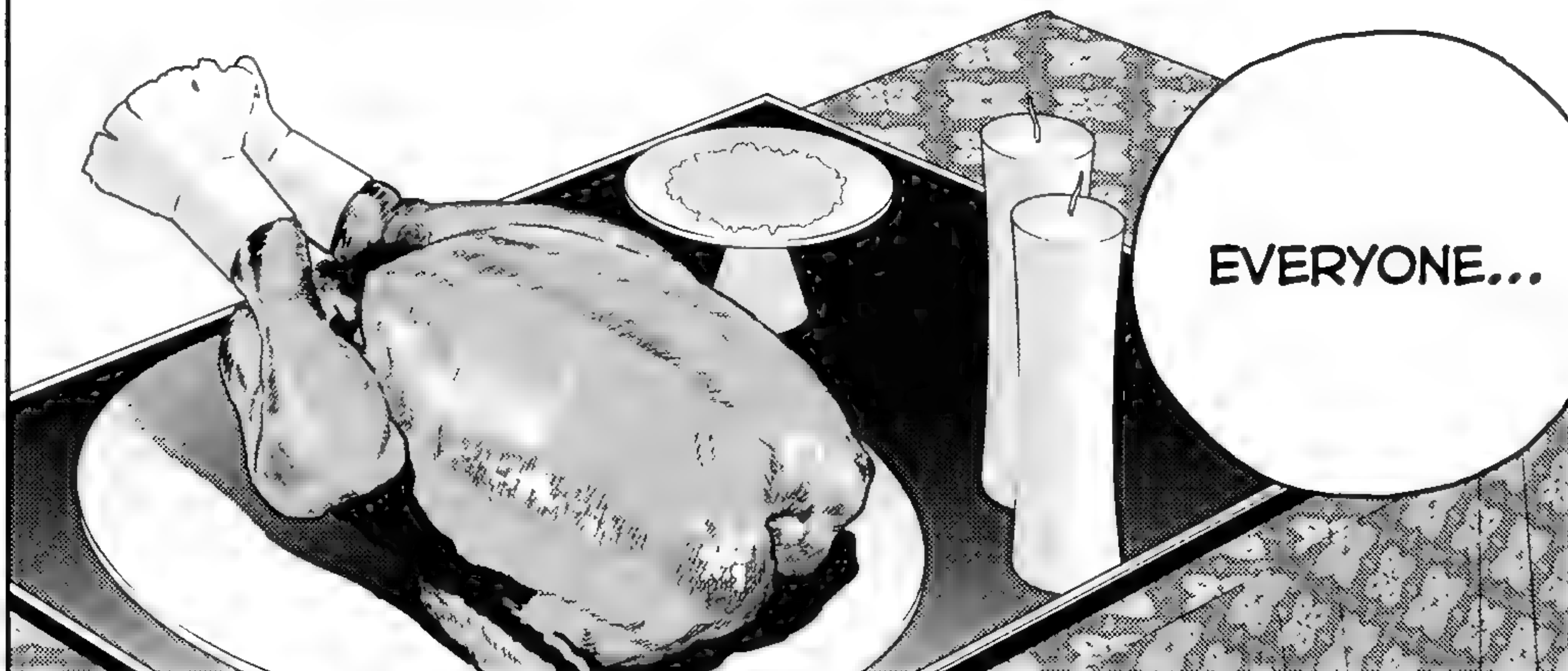


...KONGMING?!

WHAT  
ARE YOU  
PLANNING  
TO DO THIS  
TIME...



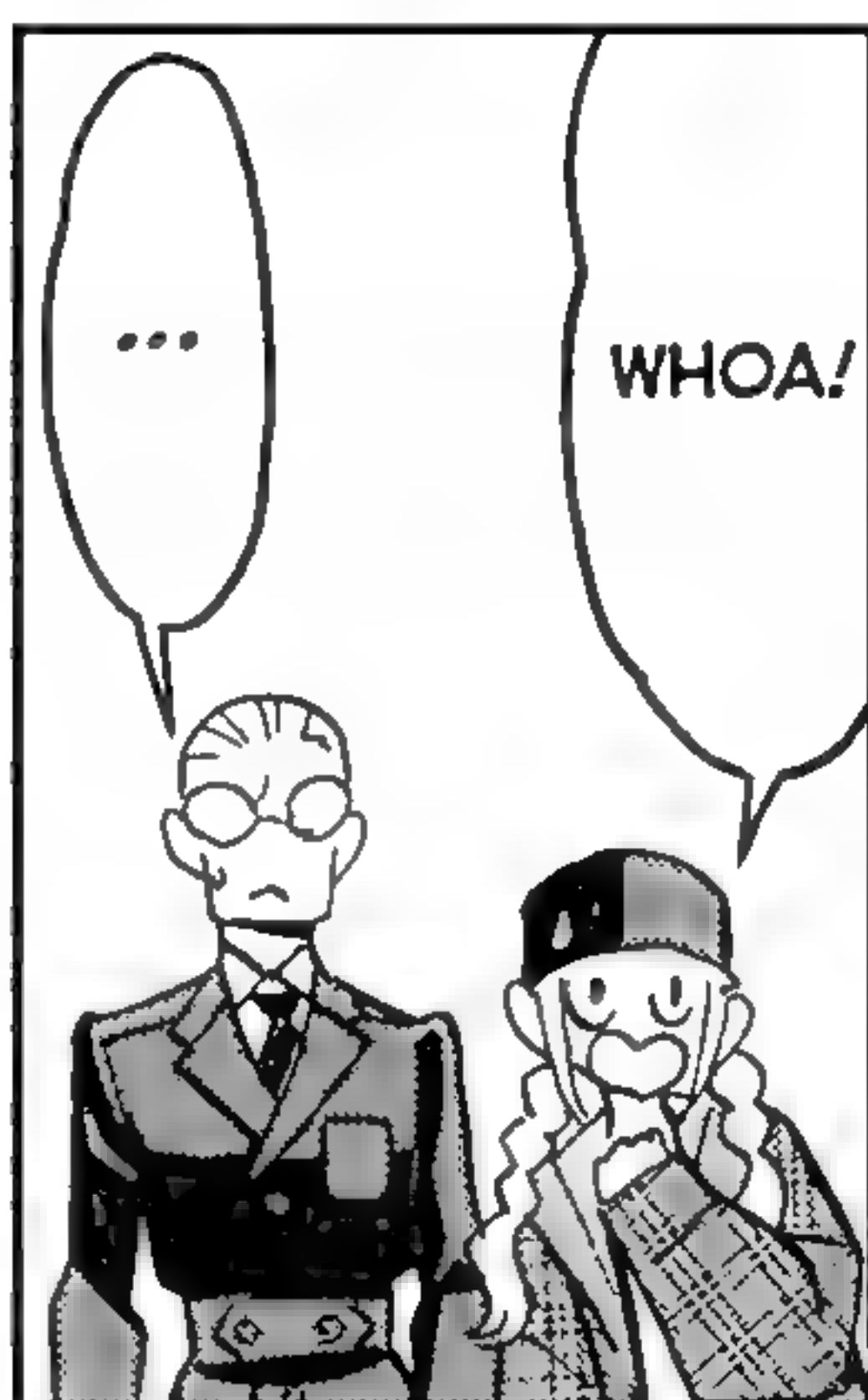




EVERYONE...



...I SHALL  
PRAY TO THE  
WINDS UNTIL  
THE TIME IS  
RIPE.



...

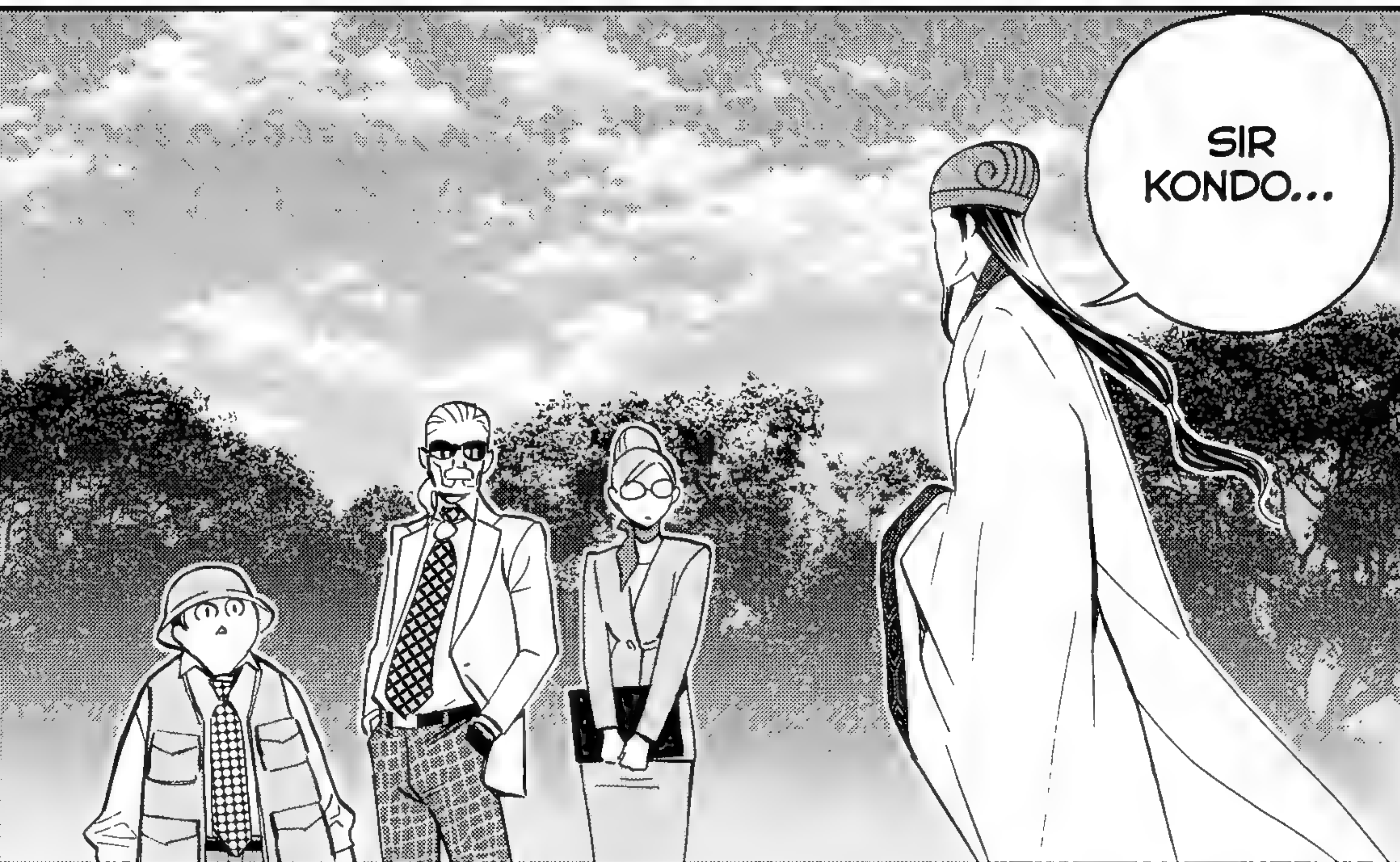
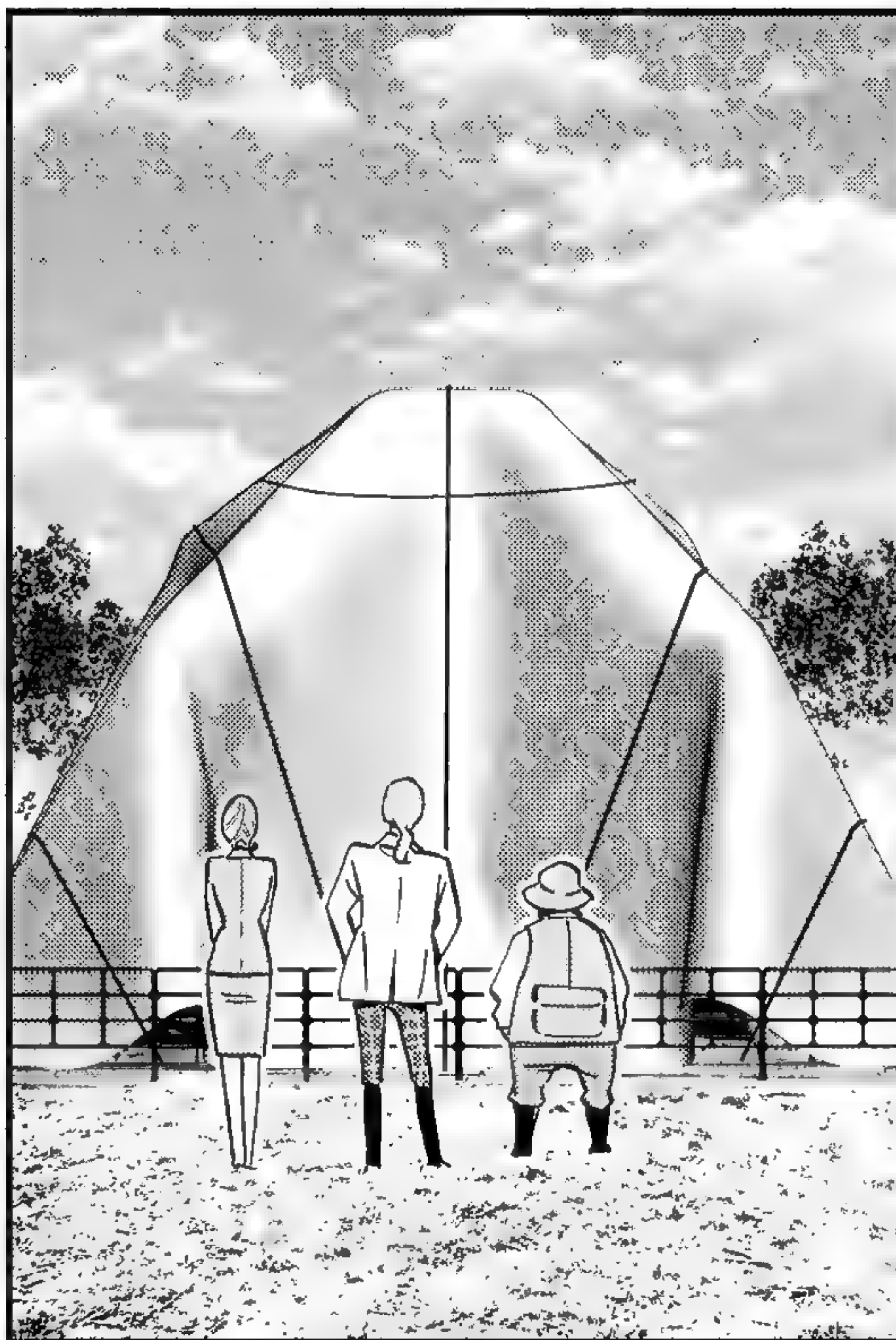
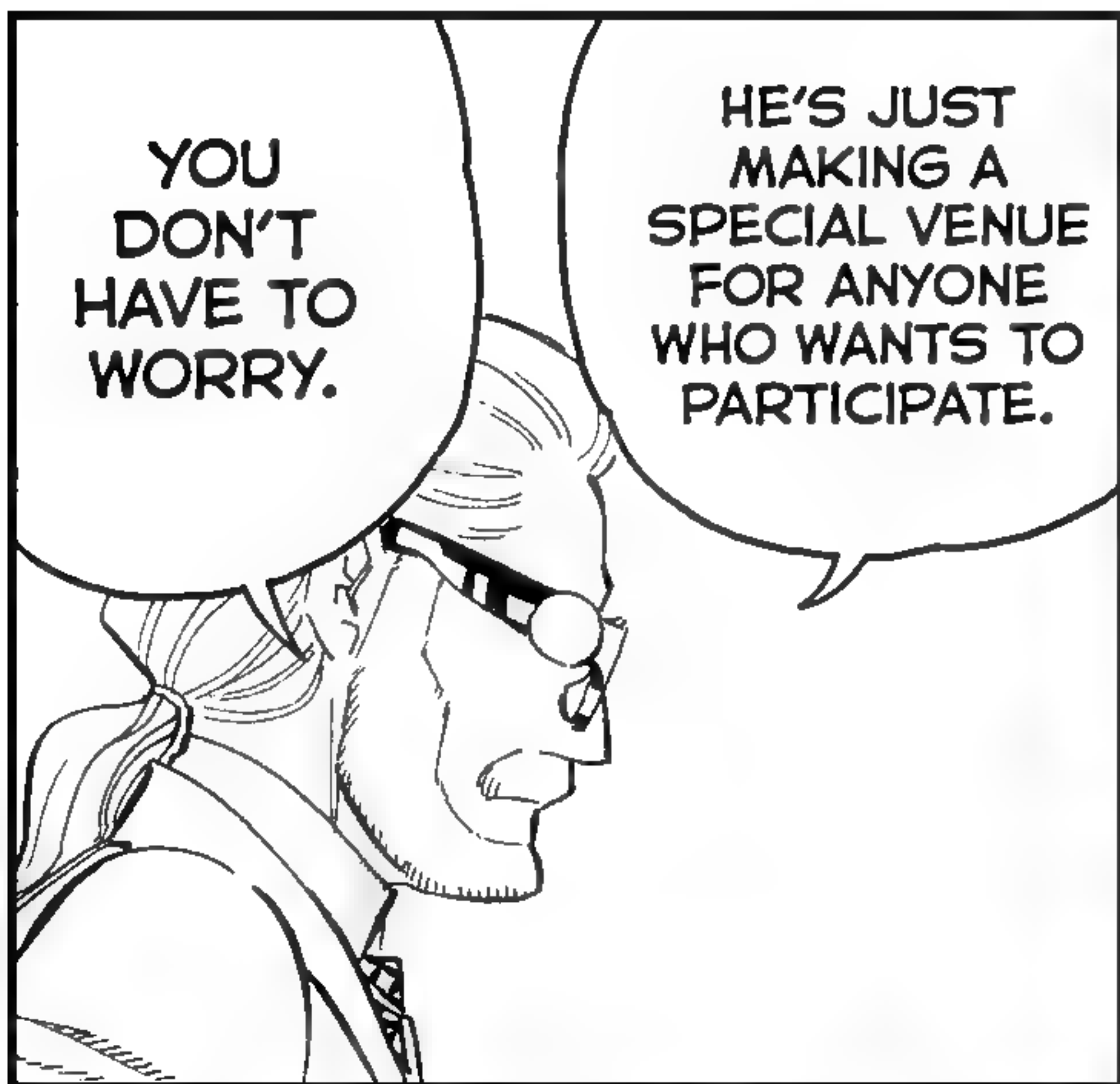
WHOA!

...SHALL BE  
CUT OFF AND  
ABANDONED.  
I HOPE YOU  
WILL ALL  
UNDER-  
STAND.

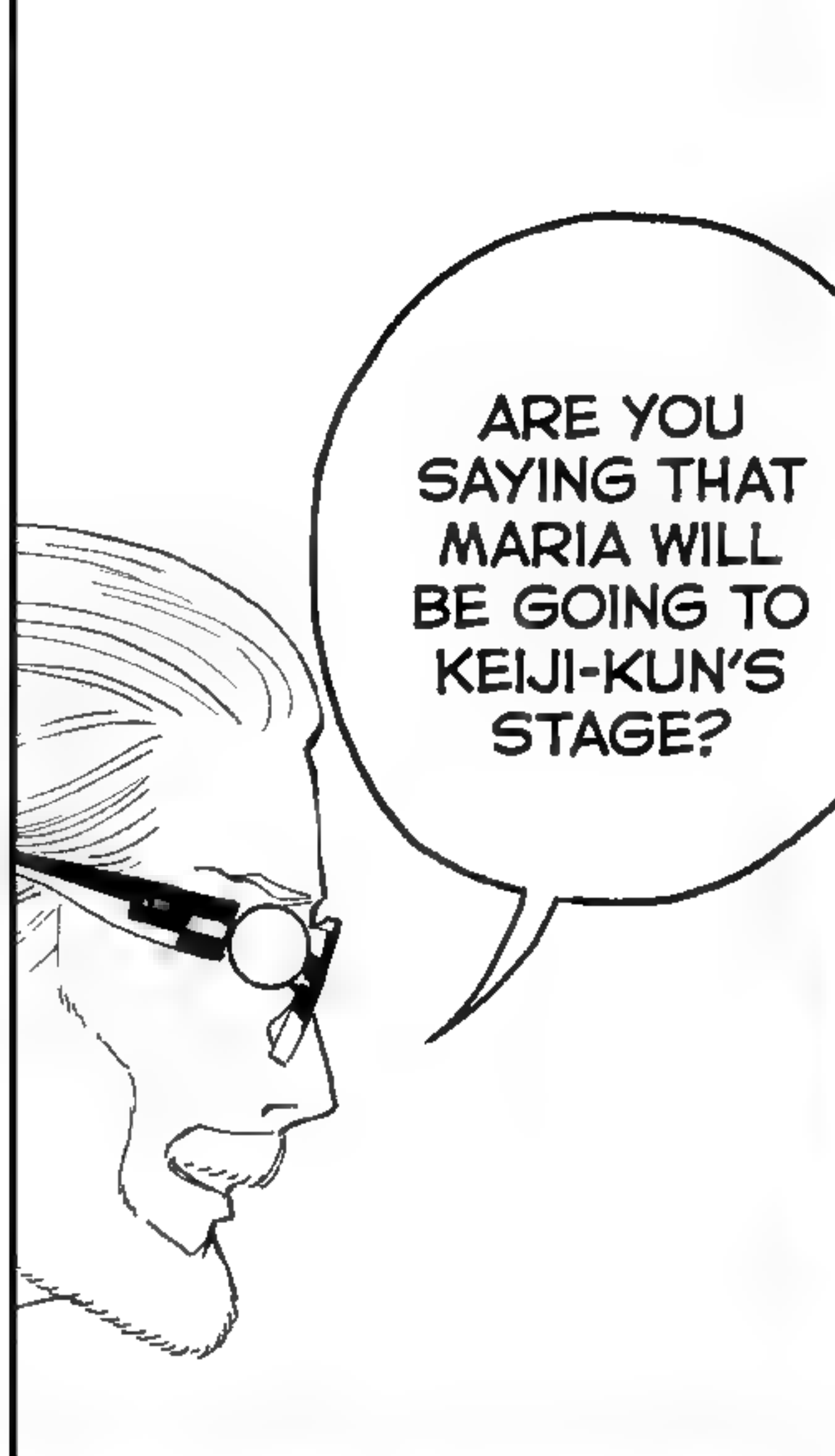
BEFORE THEN,  
ANYONE WHO  
CHOOSES NOT  
TO ENJOY THE  
FESTIVAL...









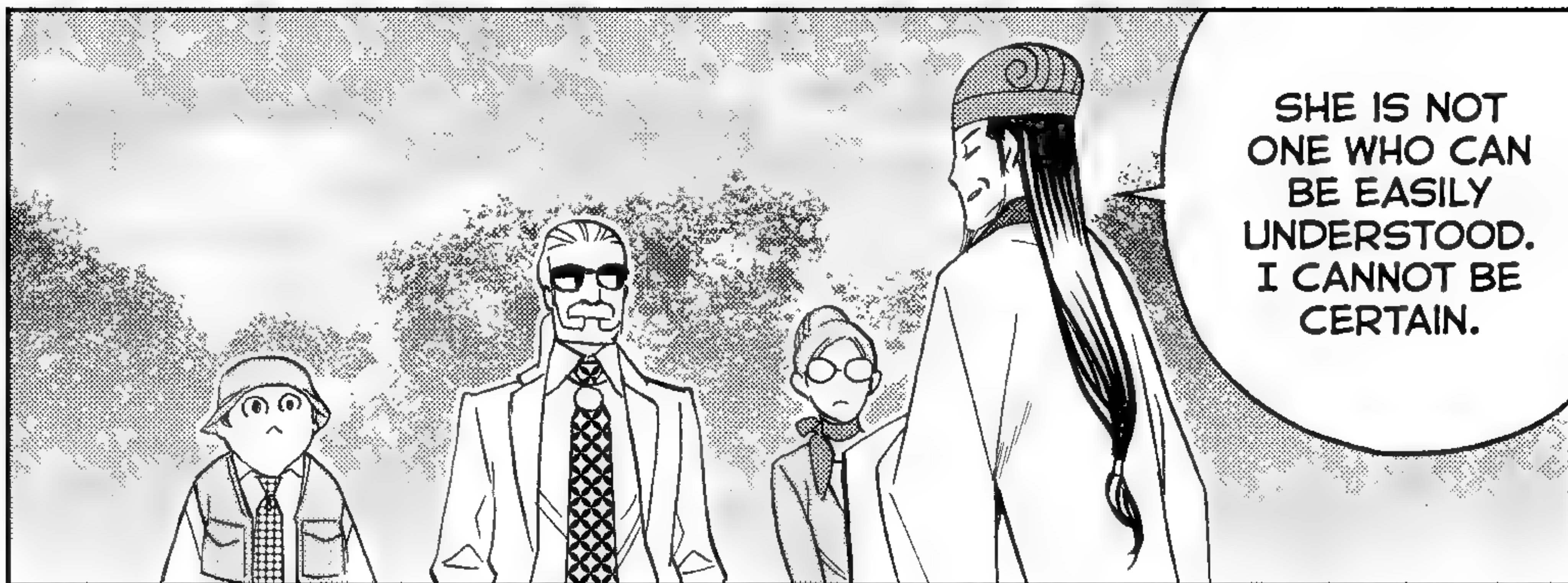


ARE YOU SAYING THAT MARIA WILL BE GOING TO KEIJI-KUN'S STAGE?



...FOR KEIJI MAEZONO'S MUSIC.

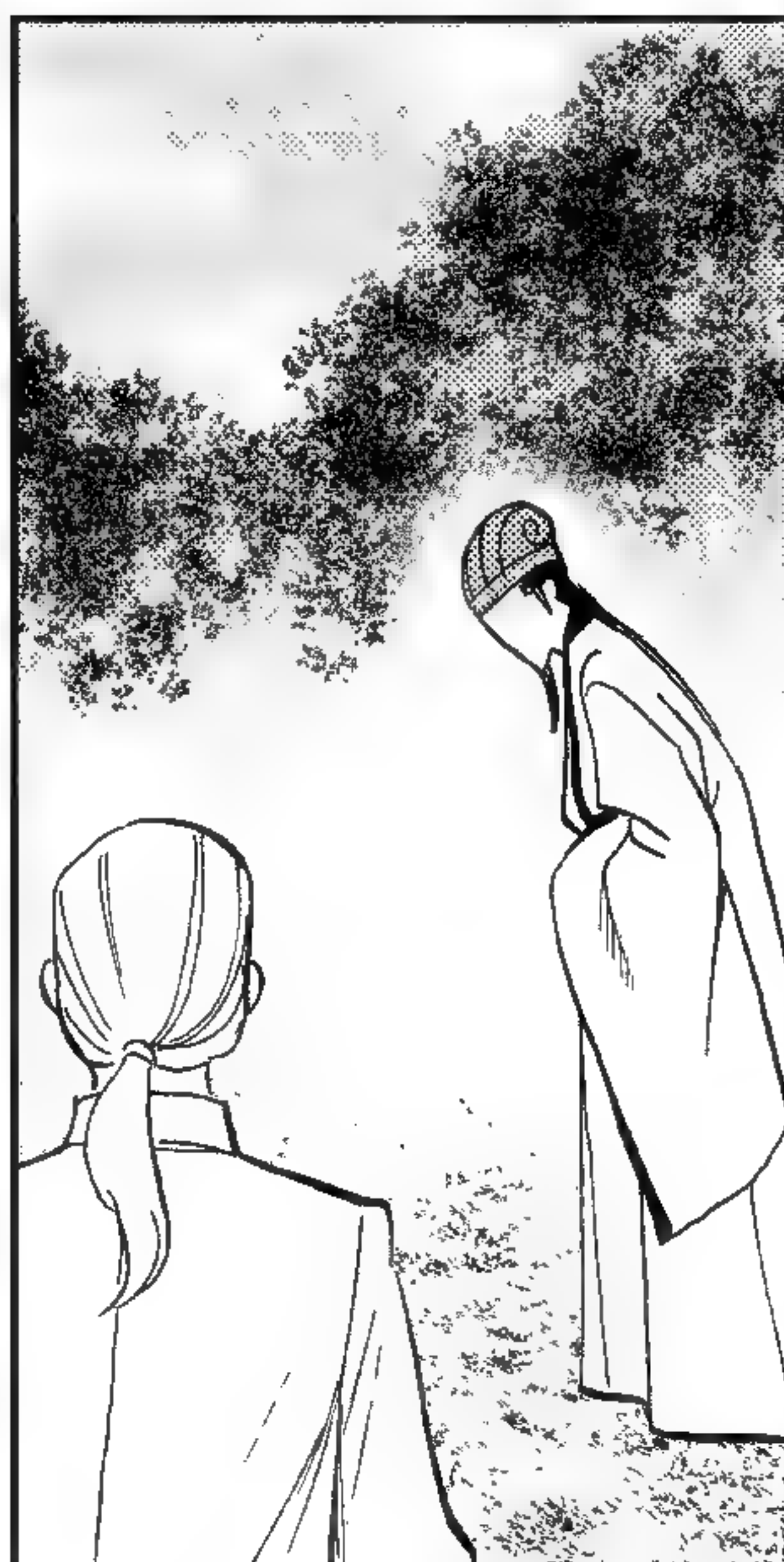
I'M SURE MARIA DIEZEL MAY HARBOR SOME LINGERING FONDNESS...



SHE IS NOT ONE WHO CAN BE EASILY UNDERSTOOD. I CANNOT BE CERTAIN.

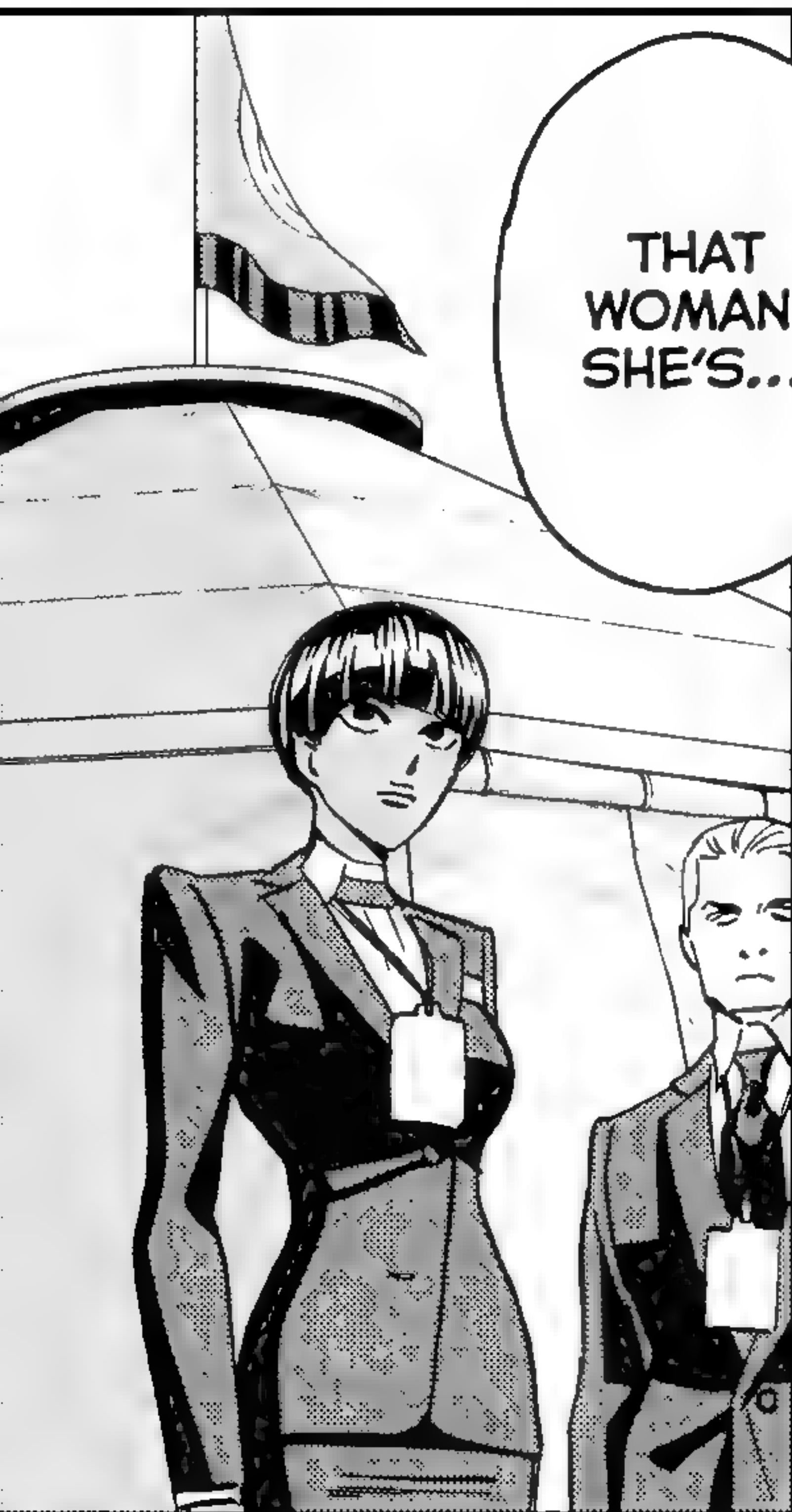
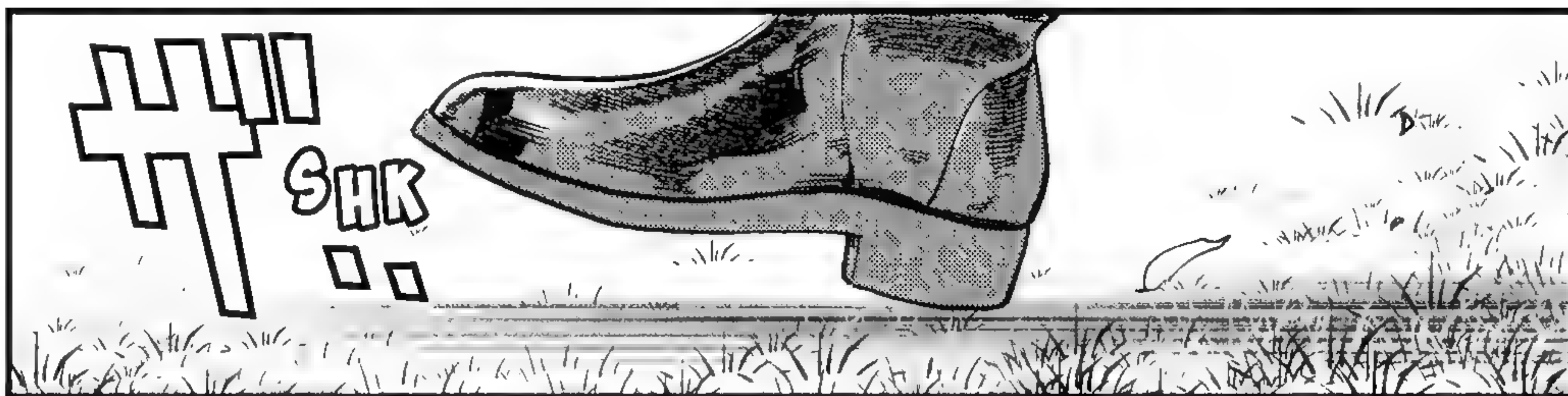
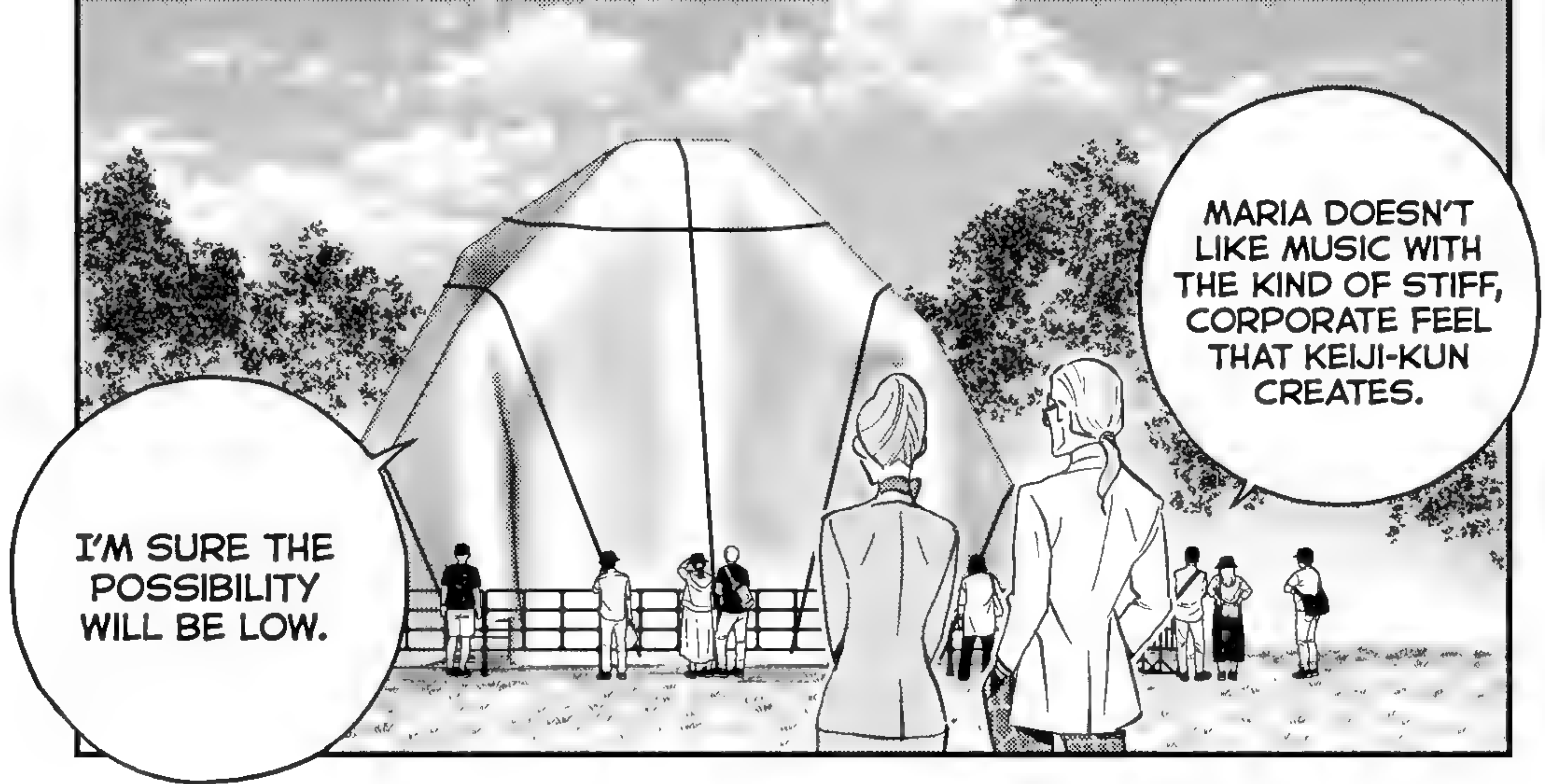


DO YOU THINK MARIA HAS ANY INTEREST IN KEIJI MAEZONO?

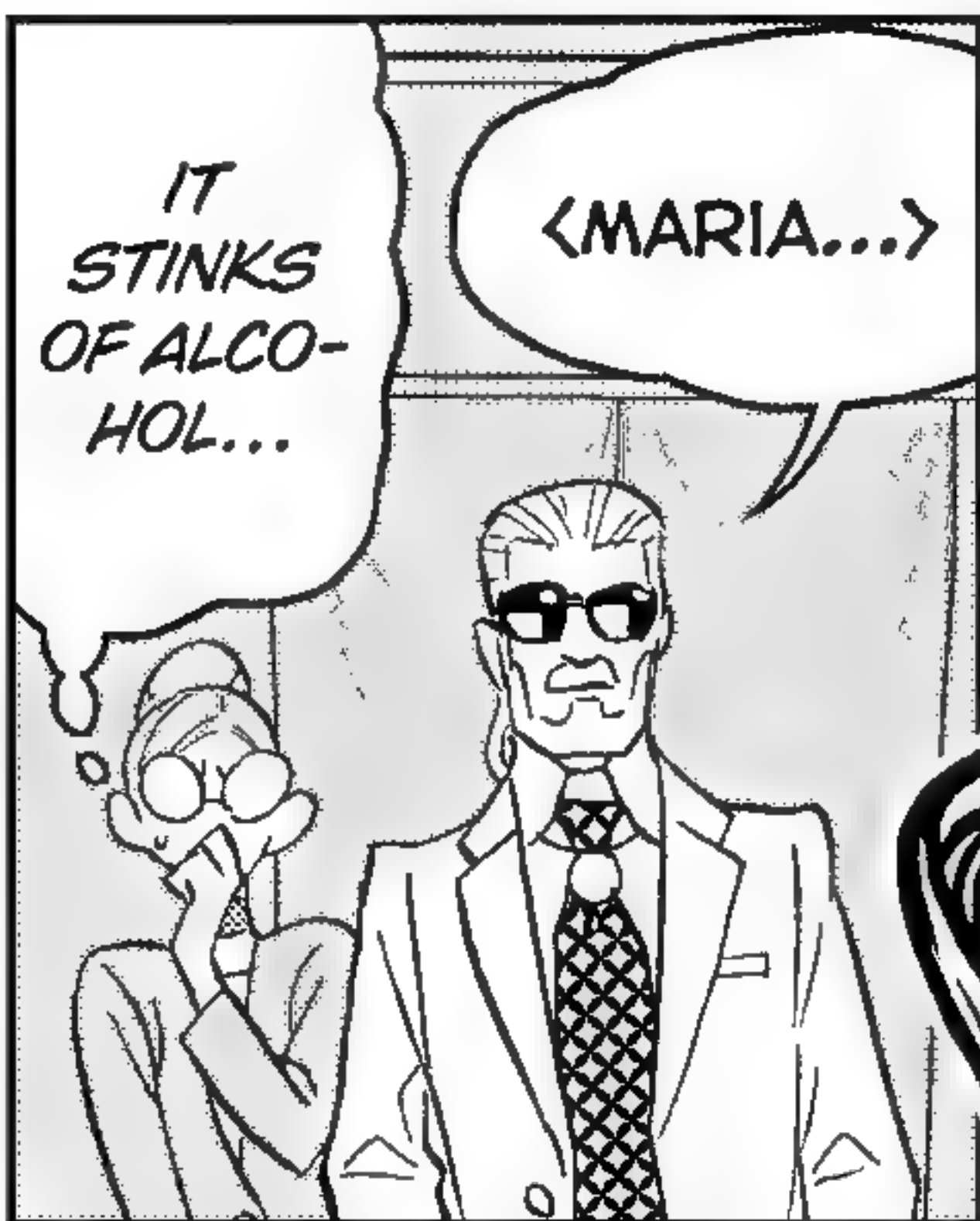


NOW, ABOUT THAT OTHER CERTAIN **MATTER...** I SHALL BE LEAVING THAT IN YOUR HANDS.

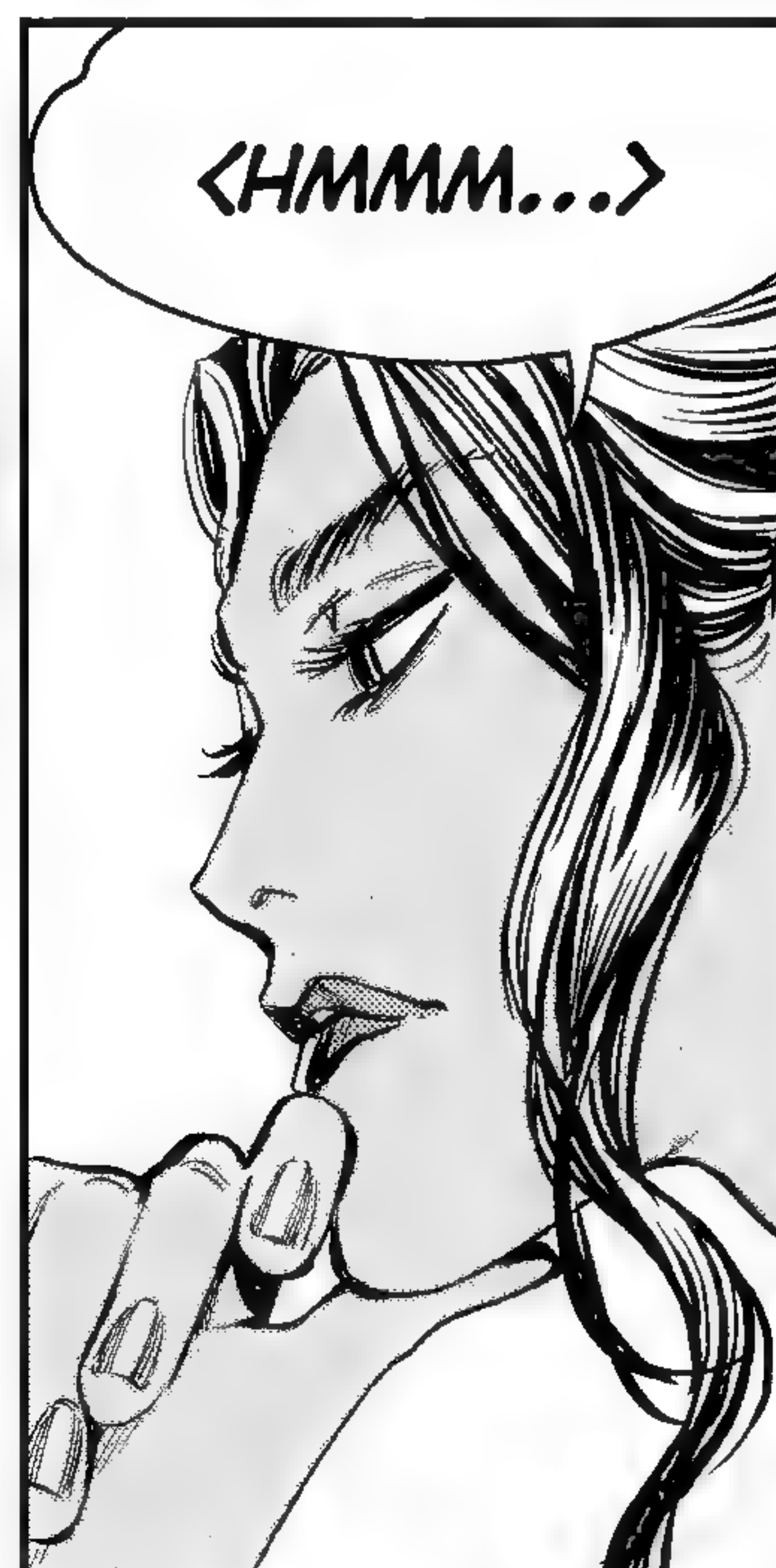
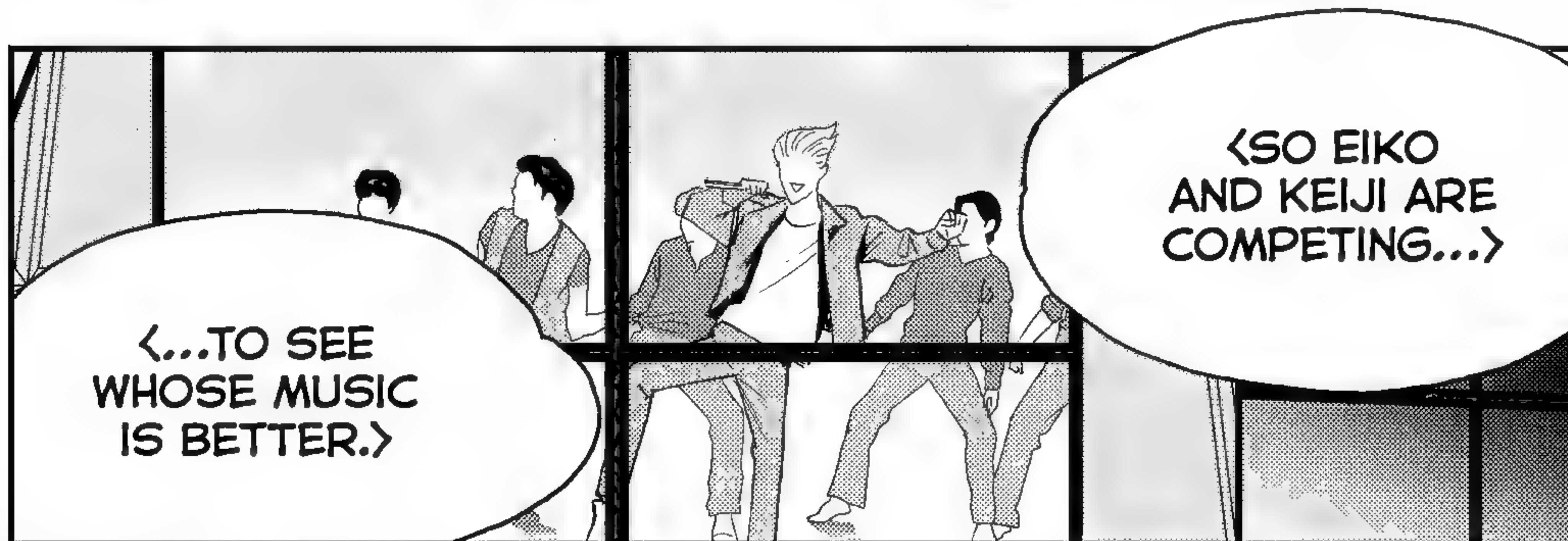




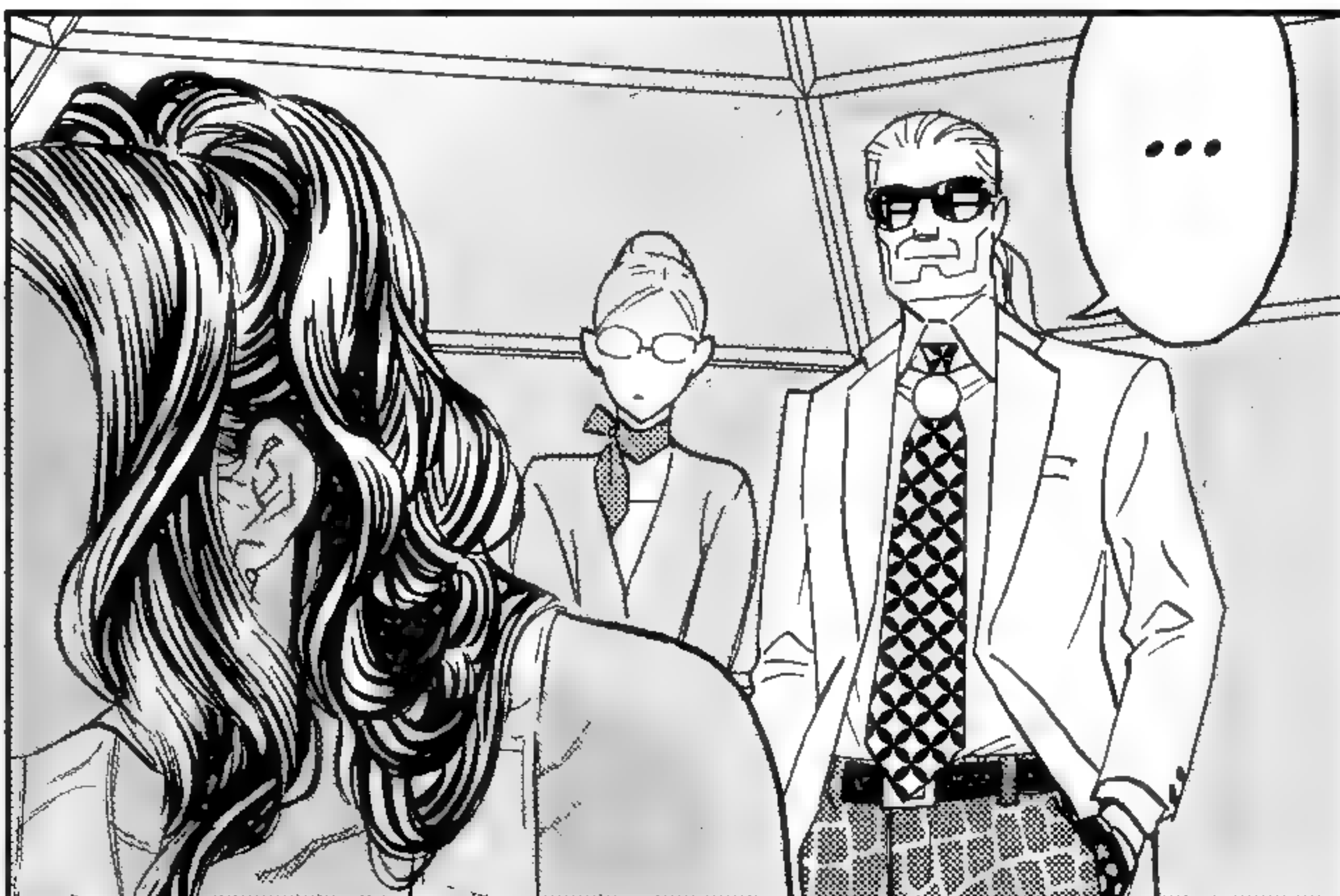
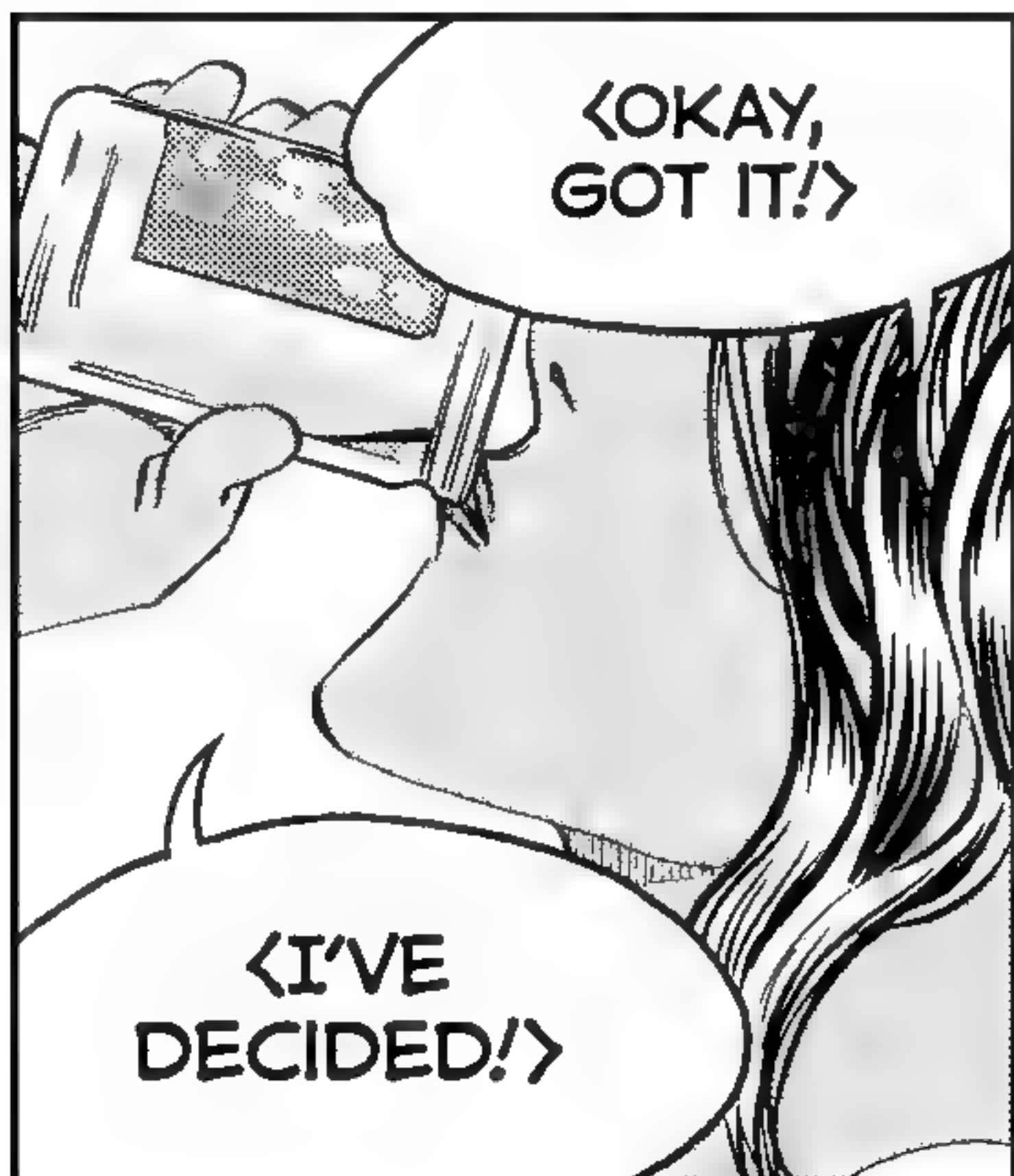
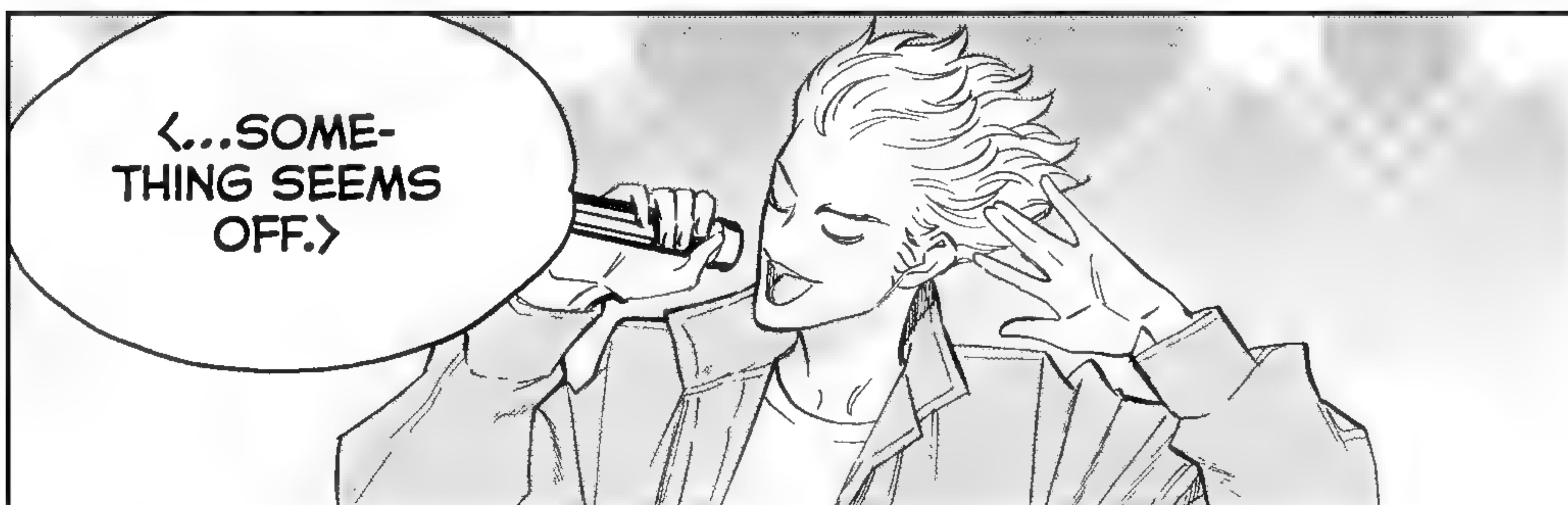
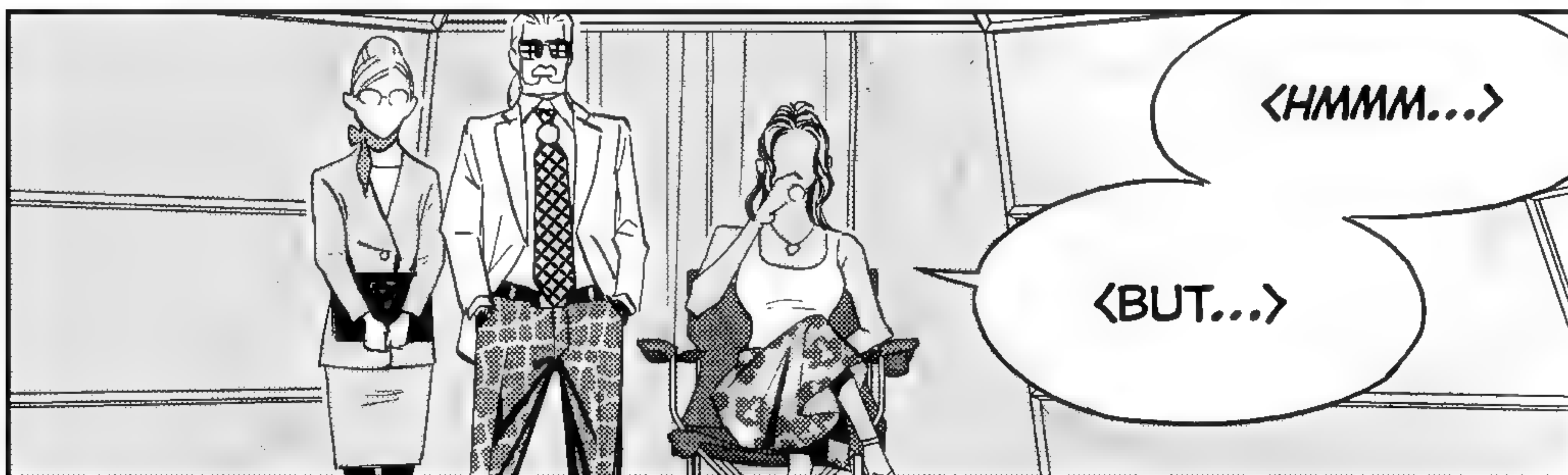
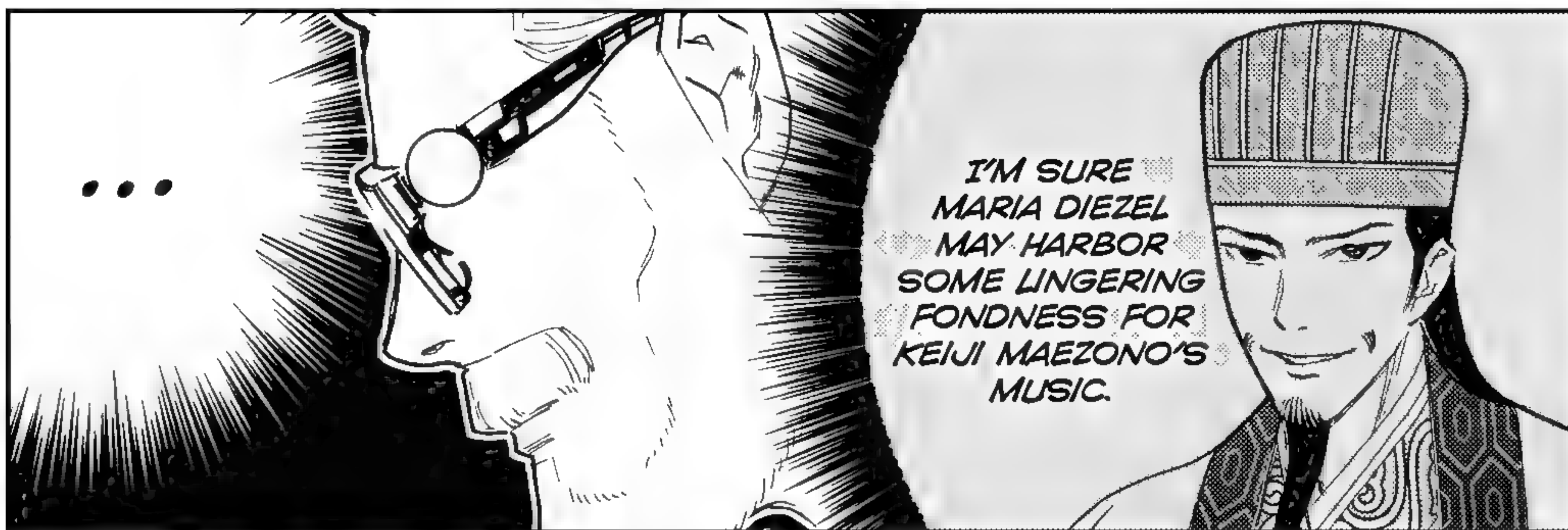




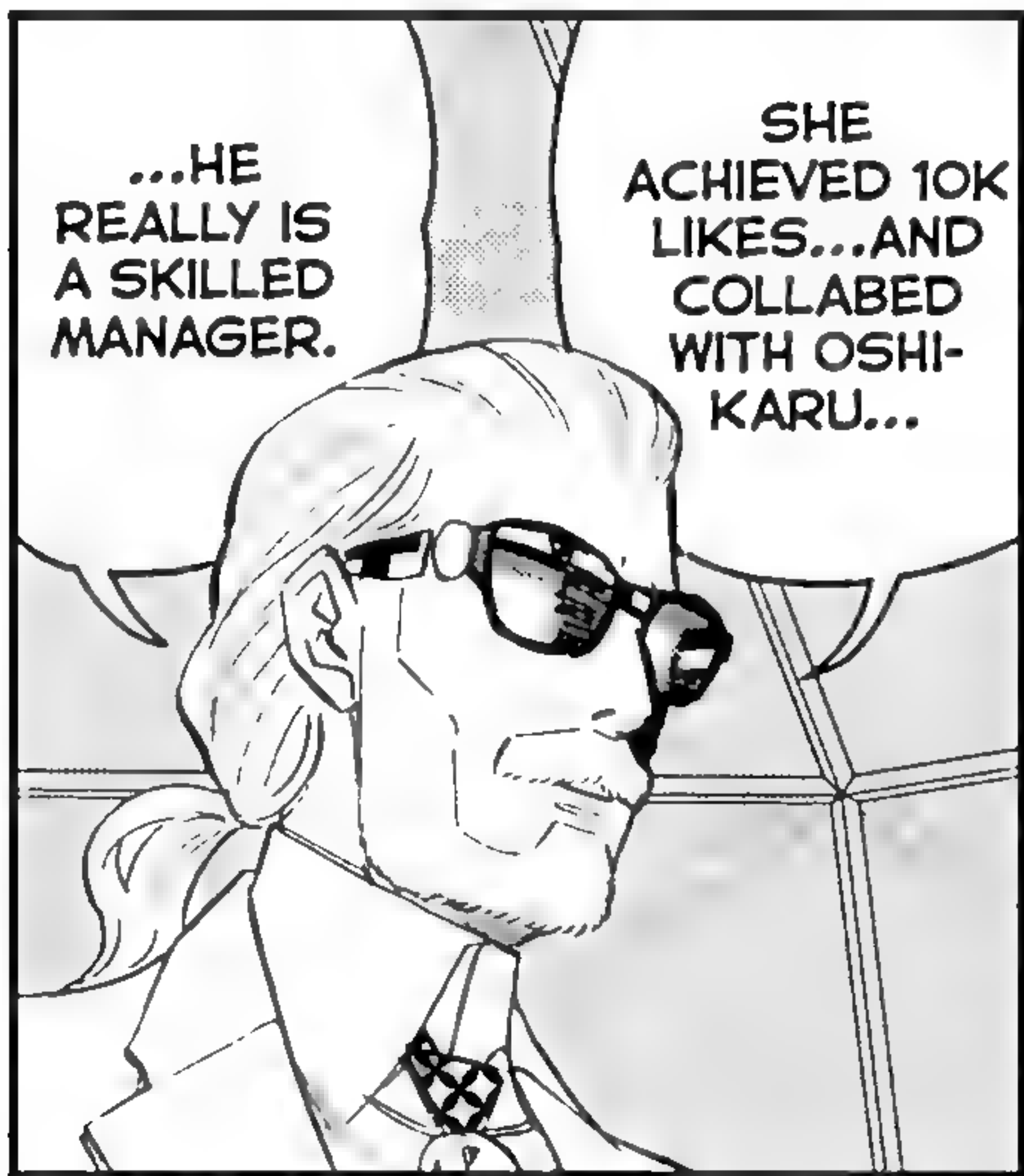

















**EAST-  
SOUTH!**

WE'LL  
BE SCOUTING  
KEIJI MAEZONO'S  
IMPORTANT  
MUSICIANS...

LET'S JUST  
TRUST HIM.



I WAS  
FLOORED WHEN  
I GOT A CALL  
FROM YOU! IT'S  
BEEN AGES, MAN.

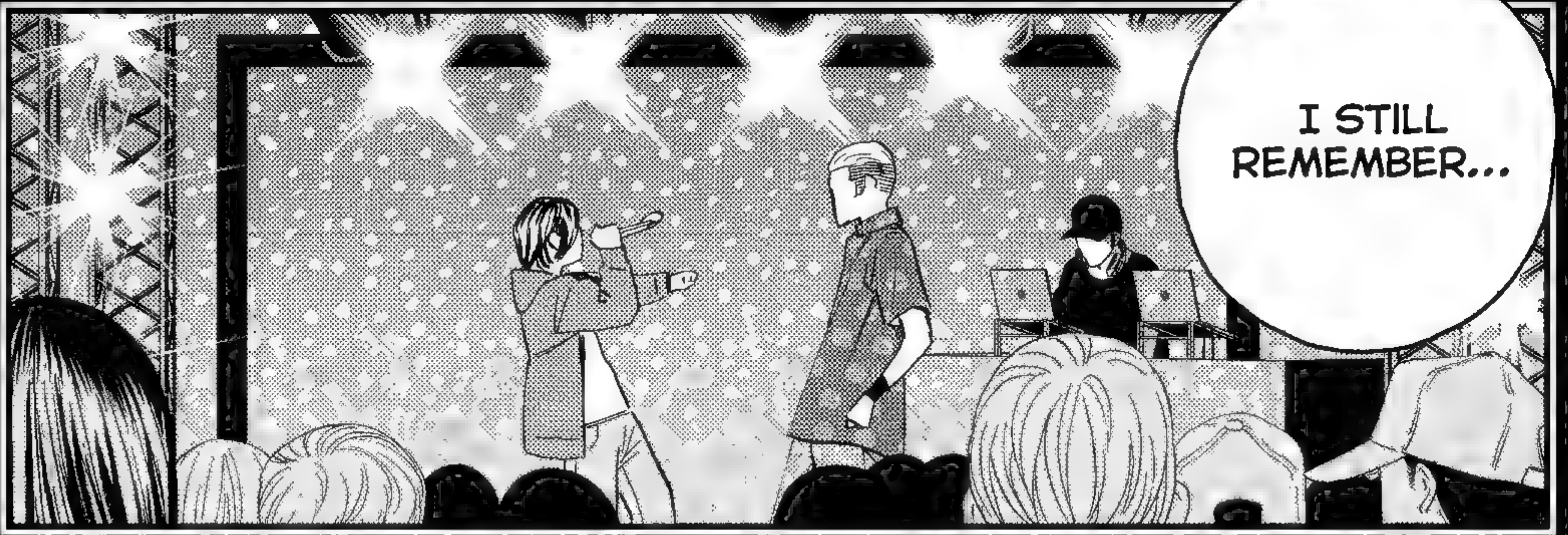


**DINER-  
SAN.**



WE HAVEN'T  
SEEN OTHER  
SINCE BACK  
WHEN I WAS IN  
HIGH SCHOOL,  
HUH?





I STILL  
REMEMBER...

...THE  
RHYMES YOU  
MANAGED TO  
PULL OUT.

...BACK  
WHEN YOU  
WERE JUST  
IN SECOND-  
YEAR...



AW MAN,  
THOSE OLD  
RHYMES ARE AN  
EMBARRASSMENT  
NOW. GIMME A  
BREAK.



**DING**

SOMEBODY  
HUGE!

...

WHO  
DID YOU  
WANT ME  
TO MEET?

SO,  
HEY...





**KABETAIJIN-  
KUN!**

SORRY FOR  
CALLING YOU  
ALL THE WAY  
OUT HERE!

!

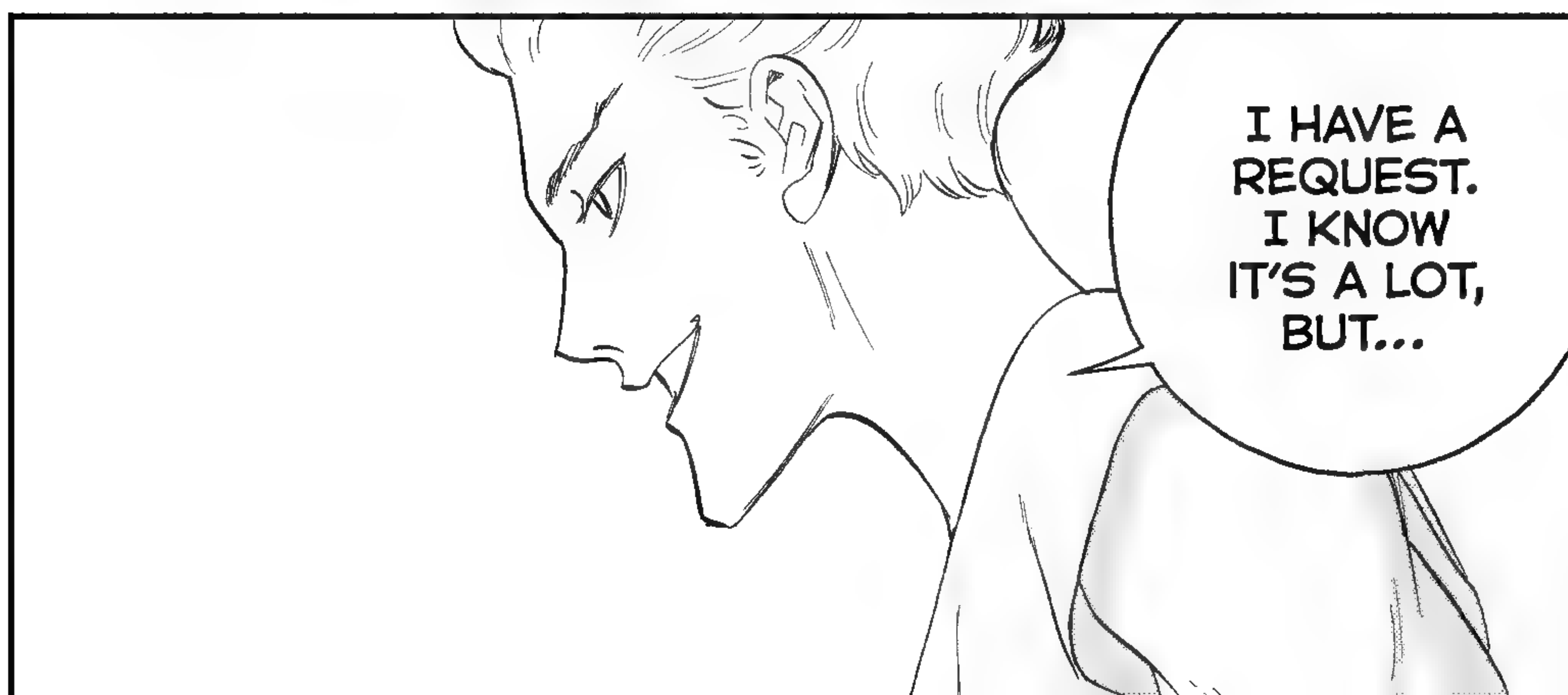
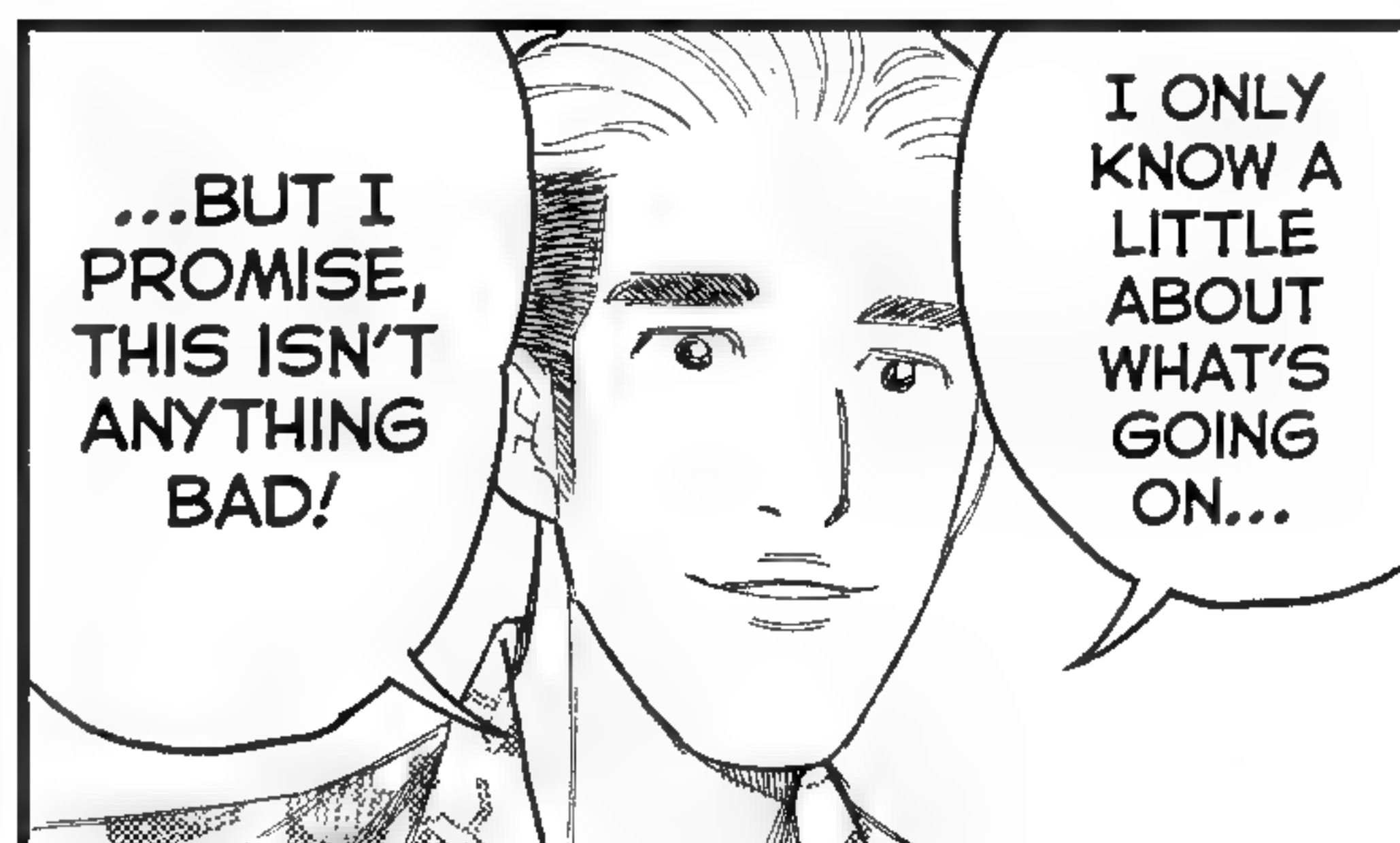
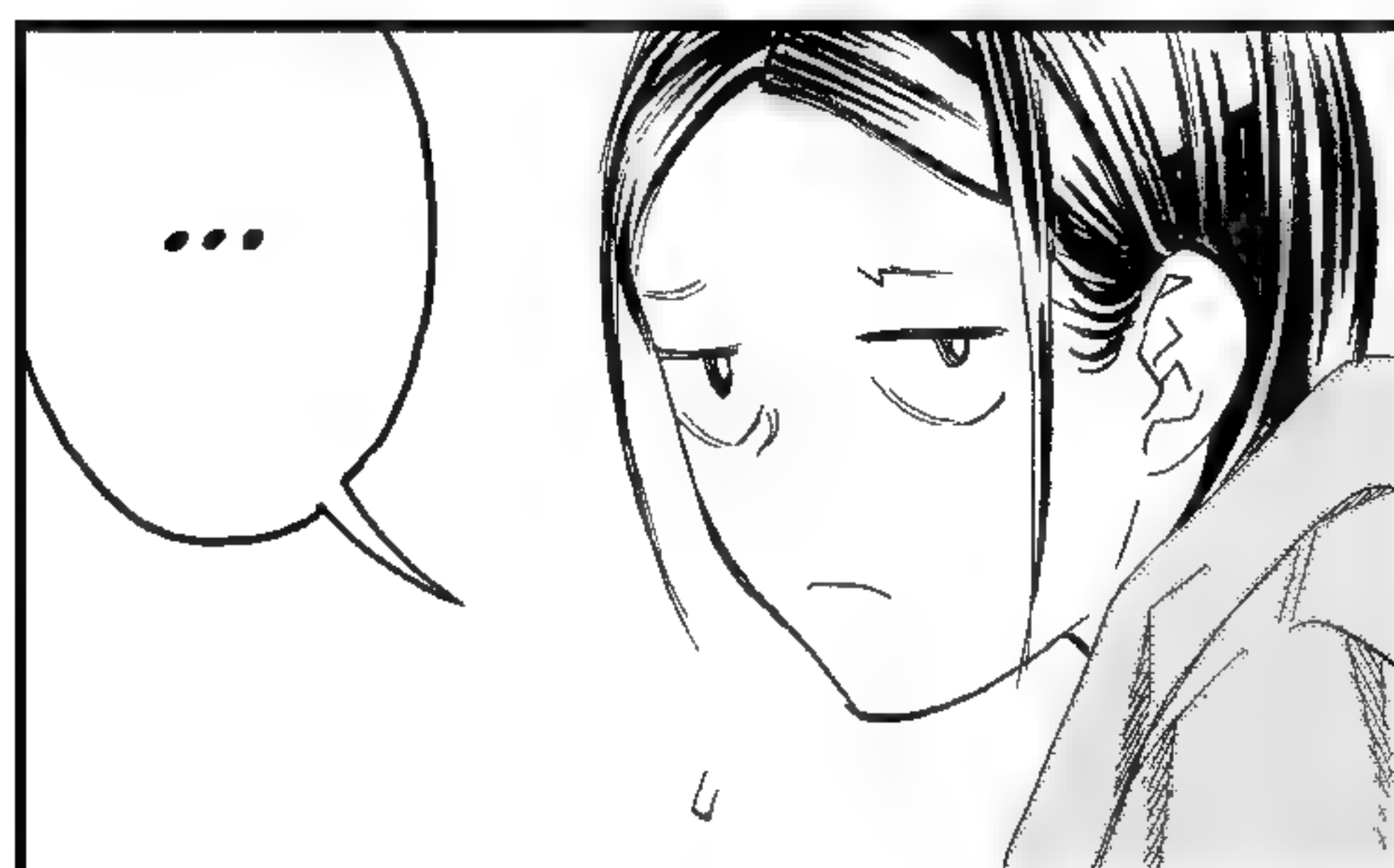
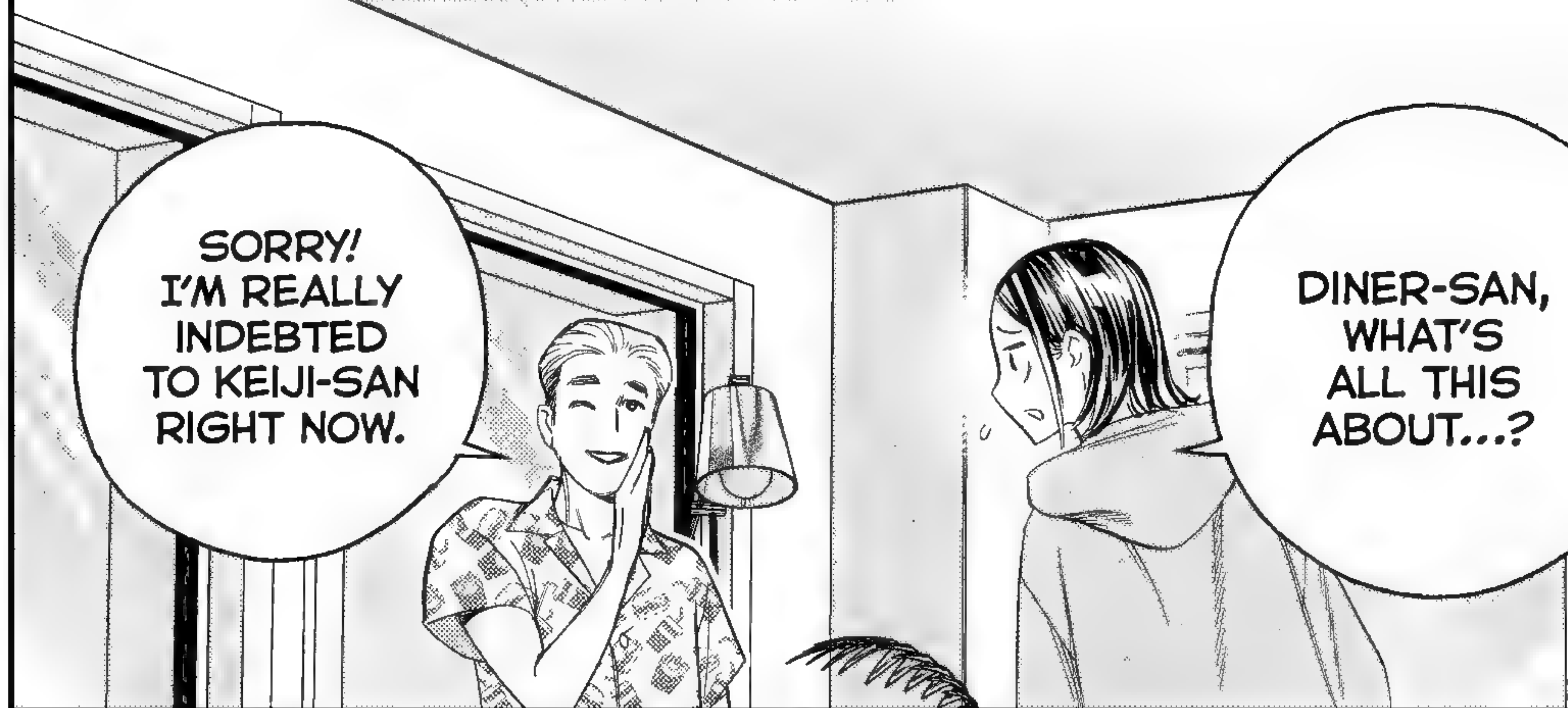
TOO BAD  
FOR SEKITOBA,  
BUT THAT WAS  
A BATTLE ONLY  
THE TWO OF YOU  
COULD PULL  
OFF!

THIS IS  
EXACTLY WHY  
YOU WERE  
CROWNED THE  
INVENTIVE KING  
OF THE RAP  
WORLD!

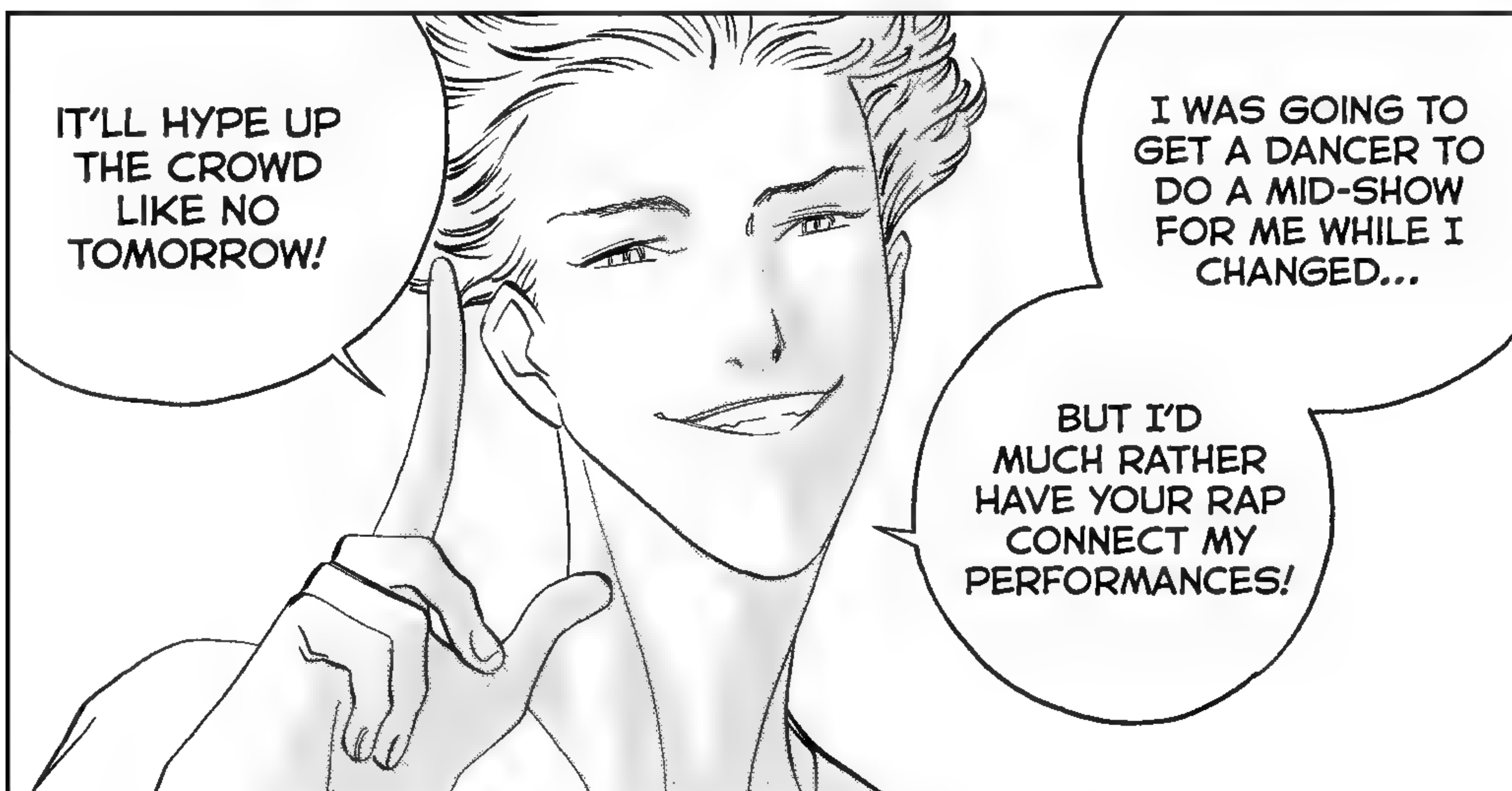
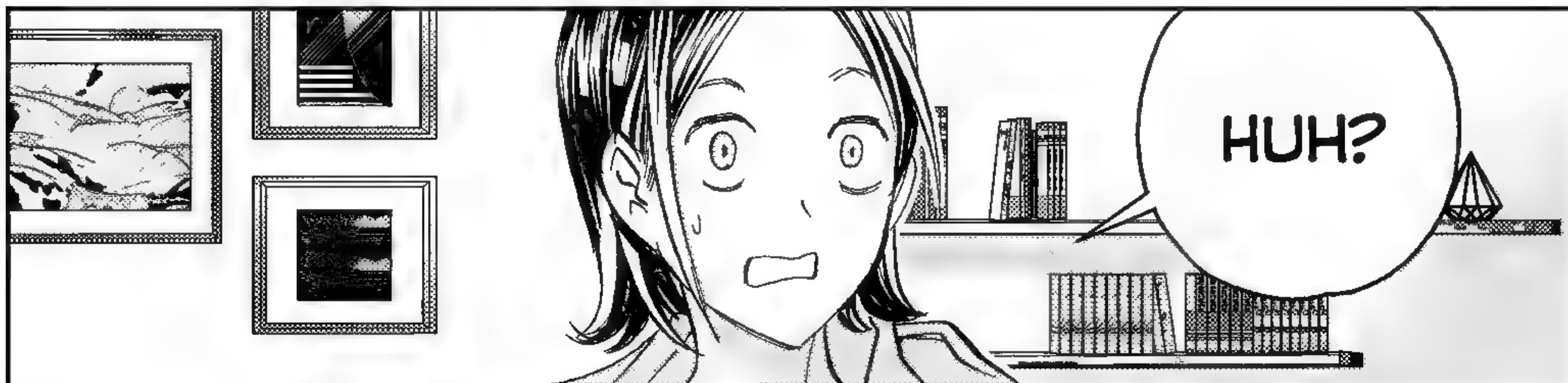
YOUR BATTLE  
WITH SEKITOBA  
KUNGFU  
TOUCHED MY  
VERY SOUL!

HUH...

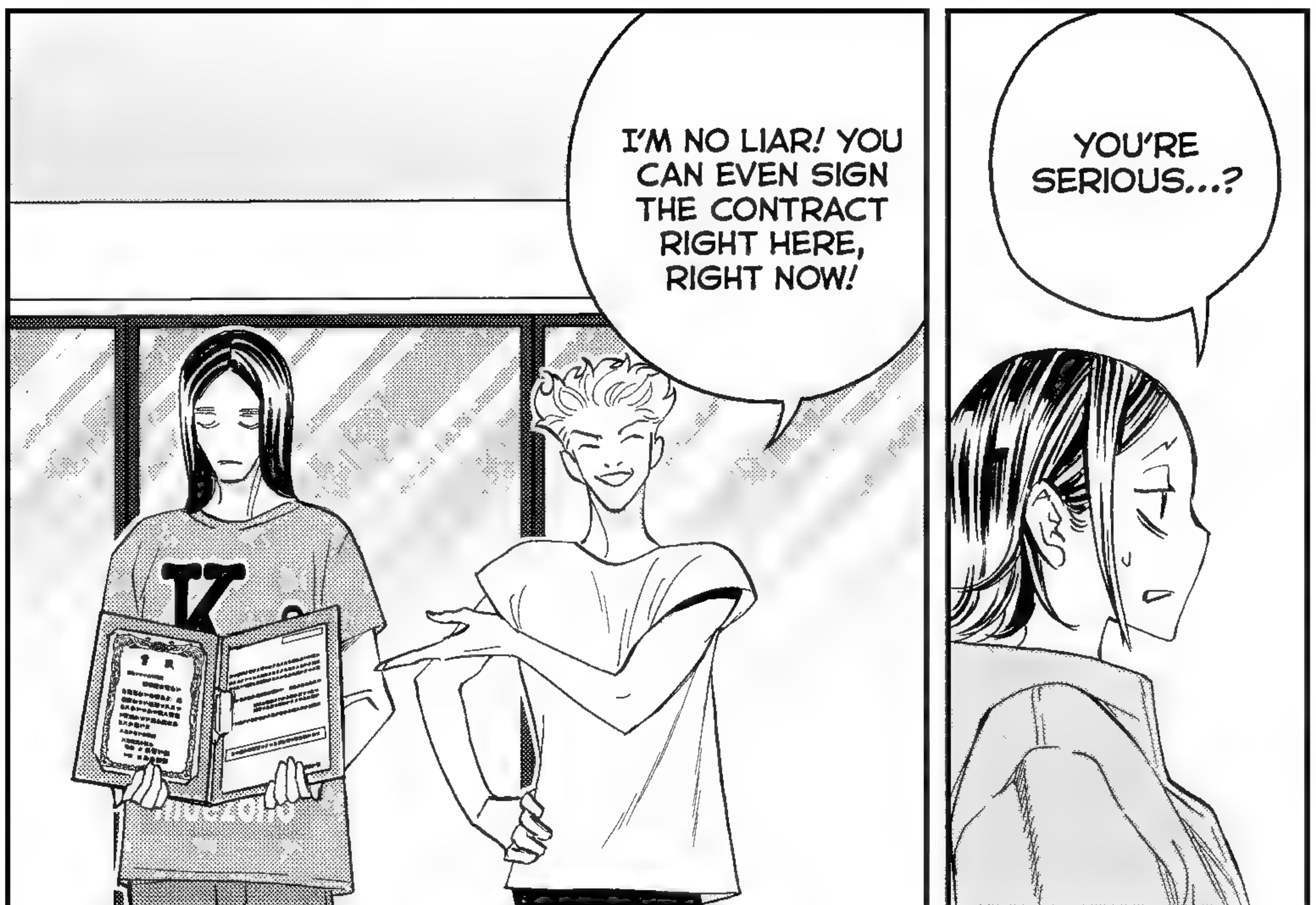
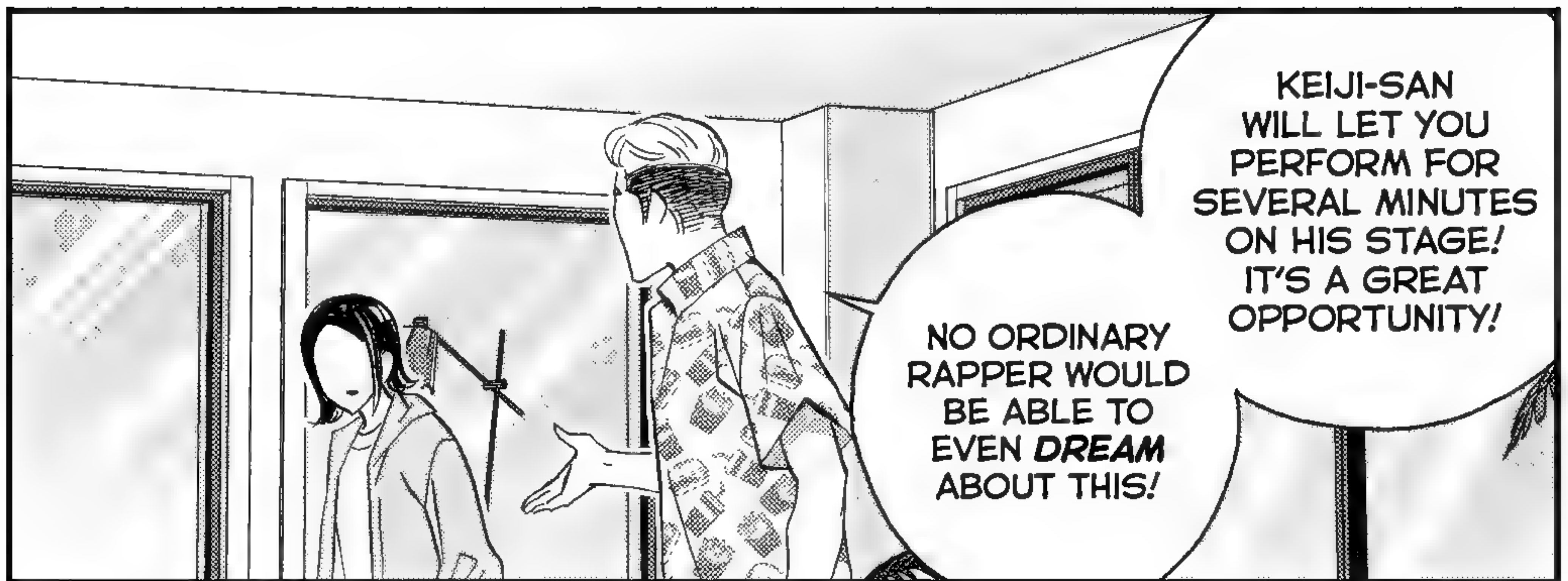




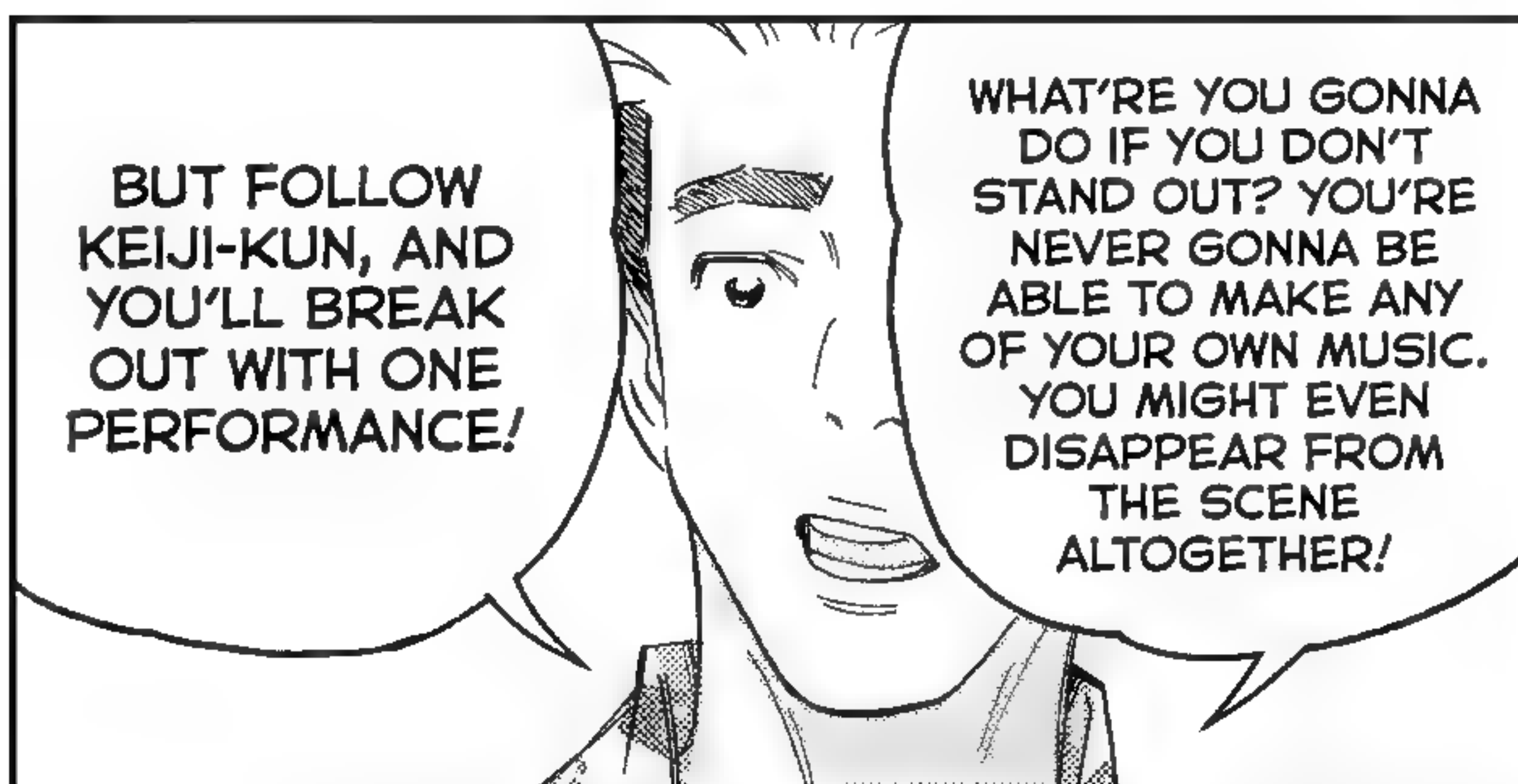
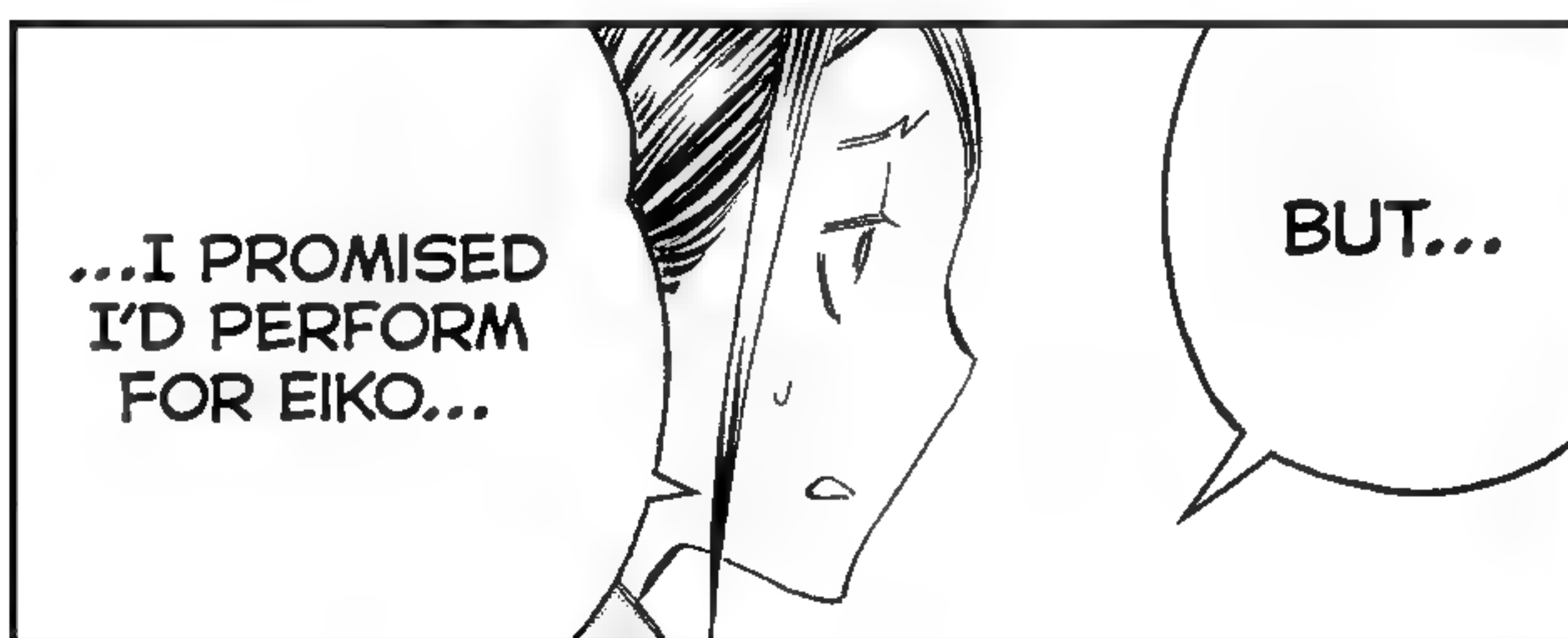
















**...SHE'LL  
BE FINE EVEN  
WITHOUT YOU!**

**THII GRAB**

...



1971  
Boy  
Knows  
Nothing!



EXTRA

SPECIAL SHORT STORY

# Kongming, the Pinch-Hitter

Yuto Yotsuba

► **AS BB LOUNGE CLOSES FOR THE NIGHT** in the early morning hours of 5:30 AM in Shibuya, Kongming and Kobayashi were called out by a man who goes by the name of Kato. The two were informed that they must meet to talk about the building's maintenance—but little did they know they would be led to a mahjong parlor instead.

“Tactician Kongming, today is the day that I will emerge victorious,” Kato proclaimed, wearing his trademark baseball cap and a grin spread across his lips.

Kato was the owner of the building where BB Lounge was located, and he had always been kind to both Kongming and Kobayashi. He even paid it no mind when Kongming moved into a room next to the lounge's office. Always appearing with a baseball cap, a golden necklace, and a tanned face, Kato—a man in his fifties—might be intimidating at first sight, but his smile always brought out the charming crow's-feet by his eyes, and he had taken great care of the two throughout the months.

Whenever Kato had a bit of free time, he'd invite the two for a game of mahjong. However, Kongming had proven to be quite a formidable player. Kato had sworn that one of these days, he'd win against the tactician—apparently, Kato was not a man who was fond of losing.

“Kato-san, it's not fair to trick us into a game like this.” Kobayashi let out a small sigh, exhausted from a long night of work. “We can play later. Like, at around 3 PM? Kongming hasn't slept, either.”

“What're you saying? This is the *prime* time for me! I gotta go after my enemies when they're weak, right? That's one of the fundamentals of war!” Kato replied without even a hint of guilt. As a huge fan of the *sengoku* era military commanders of Japan, he often played the role of a tactician in front of Kongming and Kobayashi. “Attack during the early mornings and the dead of night...that's the basis of ancient Japanese warfare. It's your fault for being careless! For not having figured out my trap!”

“Yeah, but...ugh, are you okay, Kongming?” Kobayashi whips around to look at Kongming, who stood by silently.

Once started, a game of mahjong can last a long time. In a *hanchan*, which is only two cycles out of four, your own turn as dealer comes around, only twice, but even that can last a good 40 or even 60 minutes.

With an understanding air, Kongming flapped his feather fan and smiled excitedly at them.



“*Heb heb heb...* I, Kongming, have long since seen through your schemes. You need not worry.”

“Oh! I knew I could count on good ol’ reliable Kongming!” Kobayashi cheered, seeing Kongming’s smile. Kato, on the other hand, raised an eyebrow, his sunburnt cheek twitching at the response.

“Are you for real? You’re not just trying to put up a front, are ya?”

“I knew something like this might occur. That was why I prepared a mixed drink that could keep me awake through the morning after a full night of work.” As he said this, Kongming whipped out a bottle from his sleeves and poured a cup for Kobayashi. Kobayashi couldn’t help but swallow at the sight of the bright red liquid. It definitely seemed disgusting enough—and the color looked pretty dubious, too.

“You want me to drink this?”

“This concoction will recover all of the energy you’ve used throughout the night. You will feel as if you have slept a good eight hours.”

Kobayashi stared at the liquid before he slowly began to take a sip.

“*Aah...*”

The spicy flavor flooded his mouth like a raging storm, assaulting his insides, but the wave dissipated just as quickly as it came, leaving a refreshing and sweet taste that settled into his stomach.

“This is good!”

“It is, isn’t it?” Kongming tipped a cup into his mouth and chuckled at Kato.

Kato gritted his teeth as he watched, but as the two of them finished the drink, the man straightened his back with renewed vigor. “How about just one *hanchan*? We’ll make it quick.”

“Very well.”

Kongming quietly nodded at the suggestion.

“I’ve got a table ready. This way.” Kato walked off, leading the two to an automatic mahjong table. They all then took their seats. “This is my employee. She’ll be joining us so we have enough players.”

“My name’s Riona Arisa. It’s nice to meet the both of you.” The woman who was there by the table greeted the two with a small bow. She appeared to be around twenty years old, with a cute voice, and dressed in a frilly black blouse that matched her black, straight-cut bangs. Her arms looked milky-white as they stretched out of the ruffled sleeves towards the table. She didn’t appear to be the type who knew her way around a mahjong tile.

Kato noticed Kobayashi’s suspicious glances and nodded at them. “She may not seem like it, but she’s pretty good. Don’t worry—this game’ll be a fun one.”

“Okay, if you say so.”



“We’ll stick to official rules, like always.” They would be following competition rules, where a hand has to have one *han* (point) to count.

Kato took his seat as he finished explaining the rules. Kongming then glanced over to Arisa as he mumbled to himself and looked up. “I see, I see....” He mumbled under his breath.

“Now then, what do you plan on wagering, Sir Kato?”

“*Hm...* Of course I knew this was coming... I will be betting my very honor on this battle!”

“Your honor?”

“Yes. I have thirty years of mahjong experience...but for the first time in all those years, I’ve lost time and time again against you, Tactician Kongming, for several months in a row! My pride will not allow this to continue! So I want to make this a battle between men with their honor on the line!”

“Very well. This means that I must face you with all my strength.”

Kobayashi shivered as he watched Kongming nod without even a sliver of hesitation.

“Honor...that ain’t somethin’ I’d expect a guy who tricked us into this fight to offer up.”

Arisa let out a small giggle as she watched the men bicker.



“Let’s shuffle the tiles first.”

“Sure, if you so wish.”

Suspecting that the tiles may have been pre-set, Kobayashi shoved the tiles into the automatic shuffler. The table emitted a loud rattling sound before several straight rows of freshly shuffled tiles emerged.

The seating order was Kongming, Arisa, Kato, and then finally Koboyashi. The die was then cast.

According to the roll of the die, cute Arisa with her black bangs was the dealer. With an accustomed sweep of her hand, as if she was grabbing a snack, she made her first draw and discarded a word tile from her hand.

Kobayashi saw this and thought to himself that the girl must not be very experienced in the game after all. He dismissed her as an amateur and redirected his focus to Kongming and Kato as he stared at his own hand—which, luckily for him, was fairly good already. Perhaps it was because of Kongming’s concoction, but his eyes were wide and open and he could feel strength emitting from deep in his belly.

*I’ll get first this time!* Kobayashi was confident as the game continued, and before long, he was already one tile away from winning on the eighth round.

By the time they’d reached the twelfth round, Kobayashi had won the first hand by drawing his winning tile. “*Tsumo! Riizumo, pinfu, dora 2—Mangan. 2000, 4000!*” Incredibly,



Kobayashi had won a full 8000 points on his first hand. “Now let me join in on this little bet on everyone’s honor, yeah?” Kobayashi laughed—maybe getting a little ahead of himself.

The east match ended with Kobayashi’s victory.

After that, Kobayashi won two more hands, and Kato also won twice after drawing his winning tiles. Throughout it all, Kongming and Arisa remained silent.

Eventually, they made it to the south match. The cycle then repeated, and Arisa got to go first again. Her milky-white hands drifted over the tiles as she made the first draw of this match. Kobayashi watched as her expression remained unchanged, giving him the impression that Arisa may be a cold and unfriendly sort of girl.

Earlier in the game, Kobayashi had won, earning his victory despite not knowing what the others had in their hands. Although Kobayashi expected to win something from Arisa’s discarded tiles, she never once threw out a dangerous tile that could benefit the other players. Instead, it was clear that she was choosing what to discard based on what the others were discarding from their hands.

Just as Kobayashi opened his mouth to say something, Kongming—who hadn’t won a single match so far—began to wave his fan.

“By the way, Sir Kato...it would be a disgraceful act for any tactician to attain that additional 2000 points with the help of the young Lady Arisa. Your teamwork appears to be a little naïve, don’t you agree?” Kongming bravely questioned them out loud with a calm expression.

Hearing his words, Kato’s eyes widened, and he began to laugh. “So, you found me out—but a match is still a match. You can try to shake me as much as you want, but you ain’t gonna catch me off guard.”

“Is that so? Then allow me a few words as well.”

“What do ya wanna say?”

“Lady Arisa...won’t you please start playing seriously?”

“...” Arisa looked down. Seeing her hang her head, Kongming suddenly waved his fan at her.

“Why don’t you participate in our little bet and put your honor on the line as well? As a ***professional...***”

Kobayashi shoots up from his seat, astounded. “Professional? Her? She’s a *pro?*!”

“Indeed. I can feel it...the air of a strong warrior who has faced deadly conflict.”

“You...can’t be serious...” In response to the shocked Kobayashi, Arisa’s long eyelashes fluttered as she glanced over to Kato.

With a low growl, Kato squeezed his hands into fists. “Damn it...you saw through my plan...!”



“Kato-san! You asked a pro to help you in a game of mahjong?! Now *that* ain’t fair!” Kobayashi sat back down and let out a disappointed sigh.

As Arisa’s turn came around, she remained quiet as the corner of her lips twitched up into a smile before she tossed out another tile. It whipped through the air on the table, clacking against the others.

“...!” The sudden shift left Kobayashi speechless. A far cry from the initial timid strokes of her hand, as though she were picking up small snacks, her movements had now sped up as she showed her skills with the tiles. It was clear now that the entire atmosphere about her had changed drastically from just moments ago.

“Now I can finally have some fun with this battle.” Kongming grinned as he stared down at his own tiles with the same gaze as a tactician looking down at his army. He exchanged glances at Arisa while Kobayashi felt chills run down his spine.

Kato could feel the shift in the atmosphere as well. He now understood full well that he would no longer have Arisa’s aid, and he started to panic.

The turns continued until Kongming tossed out a number eight tile.

“*Ron.*” A cute voice rang out from the table. “*Tanyao, chiitoitsu, dora 2.* 12,000.”

“*D-damaten...*! And you were just waiting for someone to discard the tile you needed the whole time!” Kobayashi stared at Arisa’s tiles. He was shocked to see that Kongming had been directly targeted that round.

*Damaten* is a hand in which the player doesn’t declare that they’re one tile away from winning, but still comes out as the victor. It was comparable to someone achieving victory by stabbing you right in the back. What’s worse, Arisa had built her hand specifically to aim for the number eight tile, which she knew Kongming was going to discard.

“You purposely waiting for the number eight tile instead of all of these other leftover tiles...”

“My, my. That was a painful loss for me.” Kongming handed over 12,000 points worth of chips to Arisa, who gave him a nonchalant smile in response.

After that match, Arisa went on to win three times in a row. Her score sped past Kobayashi’s and Kondo’s, who at the time were in first and second place.

Mahjong is ultimately all about the luck of the draw. Once Lady Luck has bestowed her blessings upon you, you can win multiple times in a row.

“*Pon.*” On the tenth round, Arisa took the center tile that was discarded and added it to her developing hand, discarding a four of bamboo.

With her strings of wins bringing her ever closer to being the overall victor of their game of mahjong, Kobayashi and Kato were both left sunken. All they could do was give up on any hope of victory themselves and only discarded safe tiles to prevent Arisa from winning.



However, amidst this chaos, there was one man who had been laying down the strategy that would lead him to victory from the very start.

“*Ron.*” On the next round, when Arisa discarded her tile, Kongming waved his feathered fan and tipped his tiles over to reveal his winning hand. “*Mentanpin, Iipeiko, dora 2, Haneman.* 12,000 points.”

“Whoa, Kongming!”

If she’s going to make a *damaten* hand, then Kongming was ready to attack back with a *damaten* strategy of his own.

Without even so much as flinching, Arisa handed the chips over to Kongming.

The struggle had changed—from a war between four factions to a battle to the death between two.



The battle escalated into a fierce fight in this mahjong parlor in Shibuya. After completing a *hanchan*, they still had yet to decide on a winner, and their game continued on for two more *hanchan* before Kongming was crowned the victor.

The winning move was when Kongming, although he had the legendary *Suanko*, or four concealed triplets, he still chose to abandon his own win by guessing Arisa’s hand and destroying it with the tiles he discarded. That tilted the scales, and Kongming secured the upper hand in the matches that followed.

“We must have a read on our opportunities when the heavens, time, and people are aligned. Then and only then can one attain victory. You best gain more experience in real battle and learn to read the atmosphere of a battlefield.”

“I’ve learned a lot from this. Thank you.” Arisa bowed her head as she thanked Kongming.

“I am proud to have fought a match against someone of your skill.”

“Thank you, Kongming *Laoshi.*” Arisa’s face grew red as she reached out for a handshake.

With a smile, Kongming took her hand. “I had a wonderful time. Now if you’ll excuse us, we’d best be going.” After a friendly bow, Kongming turned and disappeared into the streets of Shibuya in the early afternoon.

Kato, who had started the bet and the match, ended up at a whopping -130,000 points by the end of the game. His face went pale as he sat, slumped over, by a vending machine. Watching him, it really made one wonder—where had all of that manly bravado about honor gone?

“I lost... I lost completely...”

“Sheesh, this guy...” Kobayashi slotted in a coin and bought a coffee from the vending machine before leaving it beside the pale, dried-up husk that was once Kato. Despite all that



had happened, Kobayashi still couldn't bring himself to be angry at Kato. Besides, Kato was always quick to recover. Kobayashi was sure he'd be fully back to his old self again tomorrow.

Seeing Arisa stare silently at Kongming's back, Kobayashi decided to speak up. "You know...if ya wanna get stronger, you should read *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*."

"*The Three Kingdoms*...?"

"Zhuge Kongming. I don't have to tell ya where that name came from, right? He's the tactician from *Three Kingdoms*."

"*The Three Kingdoms*..."

"See ya later." Kobayashi would give anyone a lesson on the Three Kingdoms if given half the chance. Without letting this opportunity slip away, Kobayashi planted the seed that would pull the young professional mahjong player, Arisa, into the Three Kingdoms fandom.

After their meeting, Arisa took Kongming's teachings to heart and became a third-time winner in the mahjong professional leagues. However, that story can be left for another day.

-END-

\*Mahjong can be a pretty complicated game! Four people sit around a square table. Each of the seats is given a direction—North, East, South, West. The turn order always goes clockwise, but who actually goes first is decided by a die roll. Once one round ends, the person in the next direction will get to roll the next dice. One "cycle" is over after at least 4 rounds when each person has gotten a chance to roll the die, and a *hanchan* is technically "half a game," in which the players go through 2 cycles (so at least 8 rounds). If a round ends in a tie, then the round is redone and the same person who rolled the die previously will roll it again. Which direction is assigned to each player and if it's their turn to roll the die will determine which specific hands may give them more points. There are three suits of tiles—dots, bamboos, and numbers. There are also non-suited tiles, like flowers and winds. The objective of the game is to be the first to create the highest-scoring hand you can base on the suits you draw and any additional non-suited tiles. There are many different hands, and each one can give a different amount of points. Every player will draw a tile in a specific turn order, then discard a tile. Other players can take the discarded tile depending on the hand they're trying to make, or they can draw a new tile. The rules get more specific and complicated from there, but please read up on mahjong if you're interested in playing!



***Ya Boy Kongming! 10***

Kodansha Digital Edition

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